

THE VALUE FORM:
ECONOMIES OF PROSE IN TIECK, KELLER, AND WALSER

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This dissertation explores literary economies of prose in German-language literature from the 1830s to the early twentieth century, granting particular focus to questions of economic value. The problem of value, this study argues, becomes a central literary concern after the end of the *Kunstperiode* (Heine) when the question of literature's relation to everyday life – the central problem of prosaic art – turns into a reflection on the value of literature as art, as commodity, as work. While value remains an elusive problem in aesthetic, economic, and moral discourses of the nineteenth and early-twentieth century, literary authors such as Ludwig Tieck, Gottfried Keller, and Robert Walser generate an arsenal of value forms (Marx) that, in different ways, interrogate and shape relations between literature and the world, life and art, work and play, and, most of all, the status of the economic in literary texts. I analyze three value forms in Tieck, Keller, and Walser: lack and surplus; credit and debt; performance (*Leistung*) and invention. The problem of prose's value is literalized in Ludwig Tieck's novella *Des Lebens Überfluß* (1838), which documents how a last-resort Romantic attempt to turn the lack of poetry in a prosaic world into surplus runs up against value's *sine qua non*: finitude or, in Tieck's novella, need. I then analyze relations of credit and debt in Gottfried Keller's 1874 novella *Kleider machen Leute*, which, I argue, engages central discussions about what constitutes value in late-nineteenth-century political economy, philosophy, and aesthetics as it reframes the older narrative trope of fortune in terms of a capitalist transfiguration: the risky turn from insolvency

to solvency and vice versa. A last chapter argues for a subtype of literary genre, which I call the *Leistungsroman*, and which I trace specifically to Robert Walser's novel *Der Gehülfe* (1908).

Walser's novel about clerical work and the insolvency of an entrepreneurial engineer pivots not around the question of *Bildung* but around the clerical employee's (often written) job

performance in the context of a division of labor between invention and performance (*Leistung*).

The move to a *Leistungsroman* enacts a transvaluation of the modern novel, and the values of human and literary innovation and productivity that underwrite it, by reconfiguring the novel's relation to work, action, and invention.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Nathan Taylor received his B.A. in German Studies and Economics from Austin College in 2005. From 2010 to 2017 he studied in the Department of German Studies at Cornell University, receiving his M.A. in 2014 and his Ph.D. in 2017. In 2014-2016 he was a guest at the Goethe-Universität Frankfurt am Main on a DAAD Research Grant and a Mellon International Dissertation Research Fellowship from the Social Science Research Council. Since January 2017, Nathan Taylor teaches and works as *wissenschaftlicher Mitarbeiter* in the Institut für deutsche Literatur und ihre Didaktik at the Goethe-Universität Frankfurt am Main.

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INTRODUCTION

The Value Form of Literature

“In Kunst ist mit mehr Fug von Wert zu reden als sonstwo”
Theodor W. Adorno, *Ästhetische Theorie*

A Kind of Preface: Prose in the Comptoir

In the last decade of the eighteenth century, as Schiller was drafting his treatise on how the fine arts might pave the way to a truly free aesthetic state, Goethe was grappling with how to make great art and still appeal to the taste of an emerging literary public, and Kant was inaugurating aesthetic autonomy by arguing for the judgment of the beautiful as distinct from practical and epistemological matters, another literary author in Germany was confronting the very question of what his art was worth in a particularly parodic, head-on manner. That author was Jean Paul, whose confrontation was marked by embracing, rather than shunning, the overlaps between art and the utilitarian sphere of the economic. Unlike his contemporaries in a decade in German letters devoted to staking out claims to aesthetic autonomy (against a rising commodity art market), Jean Paul seems unusually comfortable with the evaluation of his art by a consumer public and the proximity of his literary work to the mercantile work of the businessman. As a sort of résumé or vignette of the literary market of its time, the preface to Jean Paul's novel *Siebenkäs* (1796) offers a prologue to this dissertation on the value of literature, an inventory of many of the economic tropes that will be explored in this study (from bookkeeping to promissory notes, to literature's status as opulent/*Leseluxus*) that spells out the complex entanglements of commercial and aesthetic value in German literature around 1800.¹

¹ Luhmann would seem to have Jean Paul's preface in mind when, in his discussion of the literary market in *Kunst der Gesellschaft*, he mentions how the consolidation of the literary market at the end of the

Jean Paul's preface, which bears the baroquish title "Vorrede, womit ich den Kaufherrn Jakob Öhrmann einschläfern mußte, weil ich seiner Tochter die Hundpostage und gegenwärtige Blumenstücke etc. etc. erzählen wollte,"² opens on Christmas Eve, 1794, when the writer "Jean Paul Friedr. Richter" walks into a store where a shopkeeper is busy preparing holiday gift books, specifically a type of book that around 1800 stands for a literature that has anything but high cultural value: the almanac.³ Making his way past the throng of last-minute Christmas-eve shoppers into the "Schreibkontor" of the lawyer and businessman Jakob Öhrmann, the first-person narrator "Jean Paul" encounters another set of books: Öhrmann's account books. Prompted by the "kaufmännische Kälte" he encounters in Öhrmann's comptoir (16), Jean Paul digresses at this point in the preface: if the original intent of his visit to Öhrmann had been to put the accountant to sleep with a long-winded recitation of his literary works so that he can get to what really matters – sharing his most recent work with Öhrmann's bibliophilic daughter whose father leaves her no time to read – Jean Paul reflects instead on the proper audience of his works. Jean Paul imagines a typology of possible audience members for his literature, organized into three categories: a "Kauf-Publikum," a "Lese-Publikum," and a "Kunst-Publikum" (16). Quickly dismissing the reading and art public as inconsequential – the former because they'll read his work in any case, the latter because their indiscriminate "[Geschmack für] alle Arten des

eighteenth century provoked defensive reactions on the part of authors and led "zu einer in die Texte selbst aufgenommenen Polemik gegen Verleger und Rezensenten (Beispiel: Jean Paul)." Niklas Luhmann, *Kunst der Gesellschaft*, 268. Jean Paul's preface, one could argue with Luhmann, demonstrates how the autonomous move from external to internal criterion for the evaluation of art, which occurs in tandem with the rise of the book market, is mirrored in the formal self-referentiality of the artwork. "Gerade literarische Texte sondern sich oft durch selbstreferentielle Hinweise dieser Art ab. (Einbau der Produktion des Textes in den Text, Ansprachen an den Leser, Seitenhiebe auf die Rezensenten sind die noch ziemlich groben Stilmittel bei Jean Paul, die zugleich der Ausdifferenzierung des Textkunstwerkes auf der Ebene der Beobachtung von Beobachtungen dienen)" (Luhmann, 188).

² Jean Paul, *Siebenkäs*, in *Werke*, vol. 2, ed. Gustav Lohmann, 15. All further citations are to this edition.

³ On the rise of the almanac and the gift book, which emerges "at precisely the moment when books where overwhelmingly being defined by their status as commodities," see Andrew Piper, *Dreaming in Books*, 123. See esp. chap. 4, "Sharing."

Geschmacks” really prefers the ‘world-literature’ of “höheren, gleichsam kosmopolitschen Schönheiten” such as Goethe, Herder, Lessing, and Wieland – Jean Paul decides to bribe (“bestechen”) the ‘buying public’ and dedicate his novel to it as the public which, at bottom, drives the literary market and “eigentlich den Buchhandel erhält” (17).

Jean Paul’s unabashed appeal to a public with purchase power – itself only a ruse or “Maske” as he describes it – is nevertheless striking for how, in tongue-in-cheek manner, of course, it mocks the sentiments of Jean Paul’s contemporary writers. “At a time when the artist is being described as just one more producer of a commodity for the market, he [the artist] is describing himself as a specially endowed person,” Raymond William writes of the period.⁴ A decade before Jean Paul’s preface, Karl Phillip Moritz⁵ – anticipating Kant’s inauguration of the autonomy of aesthetic judgment⁶ – defines the work of art as a self-sufficient object of disinterested contemplation by arguing that the artist ought to strive more for “innere Zweckmäßigkeit oder Vollkommenheit” than for the approval of his audience. Moritz condemns the artist for whom his “Werk nur in so fern werth ist, als es [. . .] Ruhm verschafft.”⁷ In *Dichtung und Wahrheit*, Goethe writes retrospectively of the literary author’s scruples against remuneration of any kind, even in the form of an honorarium (as opposed to the craftsman’s or painter’s wage and the merchant’s profit): “die Produktion von poetischen Schriften [. . .] wurde

⁴ Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society, 1780-1950*, 39.

⁵ Jean Paul in fact sends his first novel for publication to Moritz in a (successful) attempt to bypass what he calls the “geistigen Sklavenhändler” of the “Buchändler Börse.” Jean Paul Friedrich Richter to Karl Philipp Moritz, Schwarzenbach, June 7, 1792, in Jean Paul, *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. Eduard Berend, vol. 3, bk.1, 353-354.

⁶ See Martha Woodmansee, “The Interests of Disinterestedness” in *Author, Art, and the Market: Rereading the History of Aesthetics*.

⁷ Moritz, *Schriften zur Ästhetik und Poetik*, 7. If earlier Enlightenment writers such as Nicolai had condemned writing for ‘private purposes’ – seeking fame, aiming to gain an office, praising a friend, debasing an enemy, etc. – this was because the purpose of literature lay in public edification. See Heinrich Bosse, *Autorschaft ist Werkherrschaft*, note 262, 191-192. Moritz, however, rejects *any* external purpose (educative or self-promoting), emphasizing solely the artist’s concern with the “Vollkommenheit” of the work.

als etwas Heiliges angesehen, und man hielt es beinah für Simonie, ein Honorar zu nehmen oder zu steigern.”⁸ Jean Paul’s bribery of the buying public is thus, in this context, like any good parody: a blasphemous desacralization of a literary and aesthetic enterprise envisioned by authors in the 1790s precisely not a means to an end, but an end in itself.

Despite appearances, Jean Paul’s bribery of the “Kauf-Publikum” cannot be read simply as selling-out to the masses and the market. His typology of the literary public and his appeal to the part of this public that economically underwrites the book industry belongs rather, as he suggests, to a subtle repositioning of literature that, in making a mockery of those authors who would see their art as breadless, turns the commercialized status of the literary work against itself. More, therefore, than simply a jab at the Weimar cultural scene of literary elites such as Goethe and Wieland, and the reifying commercial procedures of the literary press and *Buchhandel*, Jean Paul’s ironic capitulation to the demands of a paying readership is an attempt to turn the author-reader relation itself into literary art. Quite literally bringing literature into the space of the accounting office⁹ – the comptoir of the merchant – Jean Paul turns the commercial topos into a literary one and thereby not only rewrites the relation of *schöne Literatur* to ‘prosaic

⁸ Quoted in Bosse, 79. On the role of the honorarium in the early book industry in Germany see Bosse’s chapter “Die Synthese von Mitteilung und Honorar,” 65-98.

⁹ Along with his own novels, Jean Paul brings with him actual financial instruments that are difficult to decipher from the other forms of literature in the preface (novels, books of account, etc.). The so-called “Wiener Briefe” Jean Paul brings for the merchant are a kind of promissory note that functions as a financial asset. Through the linguistic sleight-of-hands of the narrator, these ‘letters’ are likened to the apostle Paul’s epistles and poetic letters (presumably such as those of Goethe’s Werther). On the proximity of these sorts of monetary instruments to literary writing on a literary continuum of genres that mediate value prior to the complete differentiation of these genres at the end of the 18th century see Mary Poovey, *Genres of the Credit Economy*. On the religious undertones to the “Wiener Briefe” and the preface more generally see Ralf Simon, “Herzensangelegenheiten (Jean Paul, *Siebenkäs*)” in Gabriele Brandstetter and Gerhard Neumann (eds.), *Romantische Wissenspoetik: die Künste und die Wissenschaften um 1800* (Würzburg: Königshaus und Neumann, 2004), 273-286.

reality,’ as Hegel will call it,¹⁰ but also, in one paradoxical sweep, violates and reasserts what is perhaps the single most important criterion for aesthetic value around 1800: that a work of art be irreducible to any kind of use. Jean Paul’s preface violates this rule by pandering to, indeed *bribing* a buying public with his novel, dragging the work of art down into the dregs of the fully utilitarian business world (and framing art as a means to a romantic intrigue: wooing the daughter). But in a further move the preface reasserts the non-utility of literature through the very ruse of its narration: putting the merchant to sleep.¹¹ A centuries-long Horatian imperative of literature – to please and to educate – comes to an end here in a scene of narration that makes of literature a “Schlafpulver” (23). Brazenly embracing the selling-out of literature to a consumer public, Jean Paul’s weaves its own idiosyncratic path to literary autonomy through rather than around the market: taken at its word, disinterestedness in the literary work puts its audience to sleep. The merchant is, Jean Paul explains, as the type par excellence of the “Kauf-Publikum” “gegen nichts so herzlich kalt [. . .] als gegen meine Bücher” (22) and absolutely indifferent to any other books than the “Haupt und das Schmierbuch” (18), i.e. the accounting books. In other words, if the buying-public is both the financial underwriter of literature and its most indifferent audience, then the ruse of literature and literary autonomy, “die Maske,” will be to capitalize precisely on this indifference in order to access other audiences.

Jean Paul’s preface is thus a profound and witty spin on the efforts of literary authors,

¹⁰ The merchant’s bookkeeping, which the narrator Jean Paul explicitly likens to his own prose literature is a particularly expressive example of Hegel’s prosaic consciousness. Just as Hegel’s lectures on aesthetics mix prosaic form (unbound speech; non-verse) with prosaic subject matter (a prosaic consciousness characterized by ends-means rationality; a reality that mirrors this instrumentalization and one-sidedness), Jean Paul’s preface connects formal features of prose as unbound speech (digression, metonymy, etc.) with the content of its prose (the economy of literary industry).

¹¹ The reference to the “Leihbibliothek” is a tongue-in-cheek way of saying that as a consequence of its commercialization, ‘autonomous’ literature is now subject to the judgment of the masses. On this problem, see Paul Fleming, *Exemplarity and Mediocrity*.

philosophers, and aestheticians at the end of the eighteenth century to make a case for a special type of aesthetic or literary value, irreducible to market, cognitive, or moral value, and a case for a special type of judgment or reception of the work of art. And in the face of a common project in the 1790s to secure a literary or aesthetic value *sui generis*, Jean Paul goes a different route, exposing the structure that motivated autonomy aesthetics. If the rise of a “Kauf-Publikum” of literary works towards the end of the eighteenth century prompted articulations of aesthetic autonomy and notions of singular aesthetic value in the first place, Jean Paul’s preface conjures the repressed side of *schöne Literatur*: the absolutely utilitarian, absolutely economic space of the comptoir.

Through this conjuring, Jean Paul’s preface almost excessively points to the irritating overlap of the literary and the mercantile in the practice, material, tropology or form, setting, and institutional status of literature. More than a half-century before Alexis de Tocqueville will lament “democratic literatures” that “swarm with these authors who perceive in letters only an industry,”¹² Jean Paul provides a depiction of the literary industry that spells out the complex entanglement of literature and commerce in a marketplace of readers; and he does so in literary terms: Jean Paul’s prose is prose in and out of the comptoir,¹³ the accounting office wherein the literary author encounters the accountant merchant balancing his ledger books. Moreover, it is prose that narrates, in a condensed way, a series of structural confusions that haunted the project

¹² Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 450. For a reading of the implications of this literary industry in mid nineteenth-century America see Marc Shell, “The Gold Bug: Introduction to the ‘Industry of Letters’ in America” in *Money, Language, Thought*, 5-23.

¹³ While Jean Paul’s text does not inaugurate a literature of the comptoir, it anticipates the centrality of the *Schreibkontor* for nineteenth-century German literature. On the comptoir see Iuditha Balint’s forthcoming entry “Kontor” in *Handbuch Literatur und Ökonomie*, ed. Joseph Vogl and Burkhardt Wolf (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2018).

of writing literary prose in particular around 1800:¹⁴ from the confusion between the accounting books (the *libro maestro*) and the books of high literature (the *magnum opus*),¹⁵ to the confusion of business work (“Geschäft”) and literary work (“Werk”), to the confusion of the vocation of the literary author with other (literate) vocations that do not fit into a patrimonial *Rangordnung* or have the security of an *Amt*, such as that of the bourgeois merchant. The conundrum of great literature, the narrator seems to suggest with a winking eye to Kant, is that the genius poet can no longer be “gemacht” by an institution such as the “Reichs-Hof-Kanzlei” but nowadays must be “geboren” (17); and worse: “der Poet ist gar nichts und wird nichts im Staate” like, say, the philosopher.¹⁶ In a decade that opens with a critique of courtly patronage of the literary author

¹⁴ These confusions are documented in great detail in Mary Poovey, *Genres of the Credit Economy*. In Jean Paul’s preface they concern, for instance, the relation between literary prose and the prose of the “Synodalschreiben” – an official document of the church. These confusions furthermore involve the way writing and books, as well as various literary practices, or even ‘cultural techniques,’ such as ‘prefacing,’ ‘collating,’ ‘recording,’ ‘epitomizing’ are used to describe the material and activity of the literary author, bookseller, merchant, and literary press/publishing world alike in Jean Paul’s preface. The merchant, for instance, “saß auch über einem Buche, aber nicht als Vorredner, sondern als Registrator und Epitomator, er zog die Generalbilanz des Libro maestro;” both the merchant and his sons ‘lesen und schreiben kein anderes und kein geringeres Buch als das Haupt- und Schmierbuch’ – the ‘Haupt- und Schmierbuch’ being technical terms borrowed directly from accounting, a transposition one finds most famously in Georg Christoph Lichtenberg’s *Südelbücher*. On Lichtenberg’s bookkeeping-literary method as borrowed from the merchant’s double-entry bookkeeping method and the transition it announces from *inventario* to *inventio* see Markus Wilczek, “Ab. Lichtenberg’s Waste.”

¹⁵ To be sure, this confusion is not Jean Paul’s alone. In Goethe’s *Wilhelm Meister* Wilhelm’s childhood friend Werner praises the merchant’s spirit against Wilhelm’s rather disparaging depiction of the merchant, and praises double-entry bookkeeping as “eine der schönsten Erfindungen des menschlichen Geistes,” presumably against Wilhelm’s “nicht im geringsten lobenswürdig[e] [. . .] Erfindung,” his youthful poem “Jüngling am Scheidewege.” Goethe, *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*, 36. The scene in Goethe’s novel will resonate throughout the reception of the novel: Schiller calls the “Apologie des Handels” “herrlich und in einem großen Sinn” (quoted in “Nachwort,” *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*, 620); Schlegel calls the “Lob des Handels” “erhabene Poesie” (662). Novalis’ remarks on the “Evangelium der Ökonomie” in the novel are more ambivalent, if not incredibly influential for later Goethe readers such as the Romantic economist Adam Müller. See Chapter One of this study for more details on Novalis’ reading. See also Adam Müller, *Die Lehre vom Gegensatz*: “Das Evangelium der Ökonomie, wie es Novalis nennt, überschwemmt in den ‘Lehrjahren von Wilhelm Meister’ das fruchtbare Feld, auf dem man nur Blüten der Naturpoesie und Einflüsse des Wunderbaren erwartet hatte,” cited in *Goethe im Urteil seiner Kritiker*, 209.

¹⁶ Citing a long history of the literary author’s liberation from the institutional confines of the *Fürstenhof*, Jean Paul’s preface links this freedom of the poet from the institutional office of the state and court – the

(Goethe's *Torquato Tasso*), celebrates the emancipation of the poet from the conscripts of a *Regelpoetik*, and does its own work to contribute to the *Ausdifferenzierung* of the fine arts (Kant's Third Critique, notably, emphatically separates the art of the craftsman as a *Lohnkunst* from that of the fine artist), Jean Paul's prose of the comptoir presents autonomy aesthetics with a bill.¹⁷

Jean Paul's literature strives, however, on its own terms not to be business or *Geschäft*. It does so by halting and hindering the commerce of the mind. If, etymologically, commerce and business mark a negation of idleness or leisure, as Benveniste has suggested of the Latin *negotium*,¹⁸ literature marks its distance from commercial affairs by provoking a state of leisure or idleness (sleep). Jean Paul's problem is, however, that insofar as literature is constituted by polyvalences ("mehr als ein Sinn" or what the narrator calls "allerlei Bildliches und Blumiges"

fate of the bourgeois author – to the 'freedom' to sell one's works in a literary market. Marx will describe this structure of a double freedom ("frei in dem Doppelsinn") – a freedom to sell one's labor power and 'freedom' in the sense of not having at one's disposal any of the resources necessary for the realization of one's labor power – the condition of possibility for the capitalist's transformation of money into capital. Marx, *Das Kapital I*, 183.

¹⁷ Luhmann, on the other hand, suggests a number of overlaps in the autonomy that characterizes both the art system and the economic system, overlaps that condition their "Kopplung" with each other but retain their "operative Geschlossenheit." "Beziehungen zwischen Kunst und Geld kann es überhaupt nur geben, wenn diese beiden Medien und ihre Formen aus sich heraus im jeweiligen System regeneriert werden" (395). The art market, insofar as it liberates the arts from the patronage system, enables art's own criterion for the judgment of its value and thus for the self-regeneration of the art system. The decline of a hierarchical schema for determining the value of art is crucial in this regard. "Die einschlägige Literatur des 16. Jahrhunderts diskutiert neben rein technischen Fragen [. . .] vor allem Rangverhältnisse. Wer steht höher: Raffael oder Michelangelo [. . .]? Die Gesellschaft denkt sich selbst und ihre Welt noch hierarchisch. Rangentscheidungen sind, wie immer umstritten, als Ordnungsentscheidungen schlechthin gefragt [. . .] Diese Diskussion, die die Kunst nach einem allgemeinen gesellschaftlichen Muster behandelt und so der Gesellschaft zuordnet, kann auf den Kunstmarkt nicht übertragen werden. Selbstverständlich zählt auch hier Reputation. Sie drückt sich in Preisen aus. Aber man kann sich keine stabile lineare Ordnung des Ranges von Künstlern nach Maßgabe der Preise vorstellen, die für ihre Werke erzielt werden. Für Literatur ist das ohnehin unmöglich, die Bücher von Goethe würden damit unverkäuflich werden" in "Sinn der Kunst und Sinne des Marktes – zwei autonome Systeme" in *Schriften zur Kunst und Literatur*, 389-400, here 392.

¹⁸ Émile Benveniste, "An Occupation without a Name" in *Indo-European Language and Society*. See also Franco Moretti's attempt to develop out of this point an entire set of keywords for the study of literature that concern the restlessness or non-idleness of the bourgeois merchant in *The Bourgeois*, esp. no. 17, p. 8.

[22]), it reactivates the mind, and in the case of the merchant for whom every book is an accounting book, such polyvalences are quickly reduced to the unequivocal discourse of commerce (the businessman and thus the “Kauf-Publikum” have, in this sense, a doubly commercial attitude towards literature). For this reason, precisely when Jean Paul believes to have Öhrmann to sleep, the merchant is roused back into an active state by a commerce of the mind that hears in Jean Paul’s word “Solidität” the solvency of “solide Männer, welche zahlen” (21); or in response to Jean Paul’s acerbic comment on how banned books would be most securely prohibited in a public library – because the average librarian’s “verdrüßliche Miene” chases away readers better than any “Zensuredikt” (23) – the merchant, following the topos of licentiousness, is reminded of outstanding fees he is owed by a brothel. The businessman, in other words, is a figure that cannot be bored by literature by virtue of his occupation: “Keinem Menschen ist überhaupt schwerer Langeweile zu geben als einem, der sie selber immer austeilt; leichter getrau’ ich mir in fünf Minuten einer vornehmen geschäftsfreien Frau Langeweile zu machen als in ebenso vielen Stunden einem Geschäftmanne.” The businessman’s incessant preoccupation with his “Geschäft” that leaves him at once activated by *and* indifferent to the literary author’s “Werk” points thus to a disinterestedness that always undermines itself, and a literature that can thus be simultaneously both against and for a “Kauf-Publikum.” Jean Paul is haunted here by the fifty-first paragraph of Kant’s *Third Critique*, where Kant, in an attempt to distinguish between poetic literature and rhetoric, famously defines literature as a free play of the imagination that *seems* to be a “Geschäft des Verstandes.”¹⁹ Whereas poetic literature for Kant is beautiful art, in the strict sense, because it provokes a commerce of the mind that it ultimately refuses to remunerate, a kind of occupation without ulterior purpose or pay (“unabhängig vom

¹⁹ Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der Urteilkraft*, 212.

Lohne” Kant writes to separate it from mercenary art and “Lohngeschäfte”), Jean Paul defines literature here as a business of the mind that is constantly turned into actual business by the merchant. And if the fifty-first paragraph of the *Third Critique* is the moment where Kant comes closest to defining aesthetic value as non-compatible with economic value precisely by defining beautiful or fine art as “in doppelter Bedeutung freie Kunst” (Kant, 212), an art that is free from external purpose and free from remuneration, i.e. not “eine Arbeit [. . .] deren Größe sich nach einem bestimmten Maßstab beurteilen, erzwingen oder bezahlen läßt,” Jean Paul feeds the value of literature through the economic in order to rescue it. Indeed, what the mental transactions (i.e. turning Jean Paul’s poetic speech into business affairs) on the part of the merchant suggest, even as they work against Jean Paul’s goal of providing disinteresting literature, is that literature’s value cannot be assimilated to the clean and precise arithmetic of the ledger book without remainder. Literature is, then, Jean Paul’s preface suggests, like the single Swiss penny that causes a discrepancy in the merchant’s balancing of the credit and debt columns in his double-entry bookkeeping, a “Rechnungsverstoß” (19) or accounting mistake that cannot easily be balanced or attributed to either the positive or negative;²⁰ it straddles the prose of the accounting

²⁰ In her analysis of double-entry bookkeeping as part of a discourse and practice that establishes the ‘modern fact,’ Mary Poovey highlights how double-entry bookkeeping performatively creates an “effect of accuracy,” while simultaneously exposing discrepancies between nominal and real prices, that is, the gap of representation that is operative in accounting for economic value. Mary Poovey, *A History of the Modern Fact*, here 64. One could say that Jean Paul’s accounting mistake similarly highlights the fundamental and irreducible difference between literature’s value and price. Literature, one could see Jean Paul suggesting, never gives you what you pay for. See in the note above Luhmann’s remark that Goethe’s books would be unsellable if their value and price coincided. At stake here is, at least in part, a difference between material/economic and symbolic value of a literary work, a problem Bourdieu has addressed in great detail. What Bourdieu writes of the contemporary art moment applies already for Jean Paul: “Artistic work in its new definition makes artists more than ever tributaries to the whole accompaniment of commentaries and commentators who contribute directly to the production of the work of art by their reflection on an art which often itself contains a reflection on art, and on artistic effort which always encompasses an artist’s work on himself. [. . .] The discourse on the work is not a simple side-effect, designed to encourage its apprehension and appreciation, but a moment which is part of the production of the work, of its meaning and its value.” Pierre Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art*, 170. On the

office and the prose of the library, is written on paper just like the “Löschpapier” of the commodified almanac (15), encompasses the promissory note and the literary preface, and indeed describes the act of prefacing a novel and the “mündlichen Vorreden” that the bookseller uses to advertise a book.

What Jean Paul’s preface therefore makes clear, in a witty way, is that with literature’s emancipation from older poetics, with prose’s play of distinguishing itself from other forms of ‘unbound speech,’ with literature’s release from the binds of the court to its new position as commodity object for a commercial public, with its freshly-gained autonomy, in other words, literary value is something that needs to be articulated. Neither a reduction of this value to the economic, nor an attempt to ground literary value in a self-sufficiency of purpose, Jean Paul’s preface generates a form in which literary value can be articulated in relation rather than mere reduction to, in productive conflation with rather than disavowal of, the economy of literature.

This is, by analogy, the poetic problem of the modern novel in particular. If the modern novel faces the problem that it lacks any preordained poetics, rhetorical schemata, and indeed any ready-at-hand form, and must therefore, through its form, invent a poetics in every novel anew,²¹ then Jean Paul’s preface on the evaluation of his work by the merchant, his prose in the comptoir, can be read as an attempt to ground, or preface, the value of his literary work by grounding its form, which means by generating its own form of value (as opposed to the value

consequences of a numismatic disproportion between nominal and substantial representations of value (i.e. in coins) for the shift from a Renaissance to a Classical episteme see also Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things*, 166-214.

²¹ Of late Rüdiger Campe has elaborated the consequences of the novel’s constitutive formlessness and lack of poetics in various contexts. Of particular interest for this study, see Campe, “Robert Walsers Institutionenroman,” 235-250. See also Blumenberg, “Wirklichkeitsbegriff und Möglichkeit des Romans” in Hans Blumenberg and Anselm Haverkamp, *Ästhetische und metaphorologische Schriften* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2001).

forms of, say, the industry of book reviews).²² Just as the novel will distinguish itself from the ‘bare life’ it represents by giving it a form, so too does Jean Paul’s preface distinguish itself from the commodity literature by inventing a form of value. Notably, the preface plays a central role for both: if the function of a preface in the novel is to provide a basis or justification for the ‘form’ that the novel will take – underwriting or challenging its story’s fictional status, commenting on its probability or improbability – Jean Paul’s preface gives to the novel a different form: a value form. For an author whose forewords are more properly the main text than the actual main text,²³ who churns out forewords he intends to sell in assembly-line tempo,²⁴ the comments on literary industry contained in the preface to *Siebenkäs* are very much the main text, and their setting – the comptoir – very much the central setting, not just of Jean Paul’s texts but of German letters around 1800 more generally.

Talk of Value

As a *Vorrede*, too, to the *Rede von Wert* that Adorno emphatically attributes to art, Jean Paul’s *Vorrede* sets up a kind of backstory, a prologue, to this dissertation on the problem of value in German-language literature after 1800. Picking up at the moment Jean Paul’s preface highlights when the value of literature, as one specific subset of the fine arts, becomes a problem that demands a formal answer, this study poses the following question: if, as Adorno claims, art is a sphere wherein talk of value is most justified, how does art itself talk about value (economic,

²² Jean Paul’s preface features many preemptive jabs at the “Herren Redaktöre der Rezensenten und Rezensionen” (*Siebenkäs*, 19).

²³ See for instance Uwe Wirth, *Die Geburt des Autors aus dem Geist der Herausgeberfiktion*, esp. 331-337. Cf. “Vorreden” in Max Kommerell, *Jean Paul*, 158- 182.

²⁴ See the preface to the ‘second, third, and fourth, volumes’ of *Siebenkäs*: “ob ich gleich schon seit einigen Jahren mehre Vorreden im voraus verfasse und auf den Kauf ausarbeite, worin ich künftige Werne nach Vermögen erhebe. Ja, ein ganzes Münzkabinett von solchen preismedaillen und Huldigungsmünzen, die ich für fremde Verdienste mit den besten Rändelmaschinen ausprägte, steht mir immer vor Augen und läuft täglich höher an” (*Siebenkäs*, 143).

aesthetic, and ethical)? What does it have to say about value, and how does its concern with value implicate the economic and the literary in conjunction and disjunction with one another?

Two premises guide the argument of this study in major ways: the first is the assumption of a fundamental relation between the aesthetic and economic, the second is the claim of a structural affinity between increasing economization of literature and the contested status of prose. Regarding the first: following the work of scholars like John Guillory, Marc Shell, Richard T. Gray, Jochen Hörisch, and to some extent Joseph Vogl,²⁵ this study assumes that the relation between aesthetic and economic value is historically rooted in coeval inquiries into the problem of value made by the fields of aesthetics (as discourses on the judgment of taste) and political economy (as an amalgamation of political arithmetic, knowledge of populations and territories, practical policies for securing the welfare of a social body, etc.), regardless of whether one describes this relation in homological, analogical, semiotic, or discursive terms. John Guillory's study *Cultural Capital* (1993) provides a basis for this argument by tracking the emergence of these two "discourses of value" from out of the same domain of moral philosophy, joined together "in contradistinction to the concept of 'use-value.'"²⁶ Guillory shows in detail how a concept of aesthetic *value* is the product of a transformation of the problem of a judgment

²⁵ Despite lengthy analyses of discourses of economic value in political economy, Vogl's major study of economy and literature, *Kalkül und Leidenschaft*, has little to say about the relation between aesthetic and economic value. Elsewhere, however, Vogl somewhat abruptly suggests a strong relationship between the aesthetic judgment and value in the financial economy, aiming it would seem at a kind of specular financial axiology: "Die auf dem Markt zirkulierenden Informationen [sind] nicht epistemologisch, sondern allein doxalogisch begründbar. Es geht nicht um die Feststellung eines gerechtfertigten Wissens vom 'realen', 'wahren' oder 'fundamentalen' Wert der Dinge, sondern darum, wie sich Wertschätzungen aus Meinungen formieren, die die Meinung über Meinungen spiegeln. Finanzmärkte funktionieren als fortlaufender Abstimmungsprozess, in ihnen herrscht der Druck von Konformität. In den Preisen kursieren die zur Norm geronnenen Resonanzen kollektiver Ansichten [. . .] Die Form dieses ökonomischen Urteilens hat darum, kantisch gesprochen, wenig mit Erkenntnisurteilen zu tun. Sie besitzt eher ästhetischen Charakter, wenn das Geschmacksurteil nach Kant den Vorgriff auf eine 'Gemeingültigkeit' vollzieht und mit ihr eine 'unbestimmte Norm' aufruft, die - begrifflos - jedermanns Zustimmung erheischen könnte." Joseph Vogl, *Das Gespenst des Kapitals*, 155-156.

²⁶ John Guillory, *Cultural Capital*, 302.

of taste in Kant, Hume, and others, a transformation cemented through the exceptionalization of the work of art against other commodity goods and craft objects.²⁷ In Guillory's analysis, value can become affixed to the word aesthetic only at a specific historical juncture marked by the divergence of political economy and aesthetics as disciplines in a "mutual forgetting" of their common origin. In this regard, "the very concept of aesthetic *value* betrays the continued pressure of economic discourse on the language of aesthetics."²⁸ In its insistence on the belatedness of a concept of value in aesthetics, Guillory's argument, moreover, contributes to a major point in this dissertation, namely that the problem of value becomes a literary one when literature becomes 'autonomous,' and as a response to a (discursive) divorcing of economic and aesthetic value. But against Guillory, and others that assume that "the very concept of aesthetic *value* betrays the continued pressure of economic discourse on the language of aesthetics" (317), this dissertation argues that economic discourses in the literary text betray the pressure of aesthetic value. That is to say: autonomy is, for the literature in question here at least, not the point. Rather, raising the question of value *through* rather than in strict *opposition* to the economic, these literary texts are already, in a certain sense, post-autonomous. Or, if they are (still or again) autonomous, this is the result of them engaging the economic as the problem of their own value. Aesthetic or literary value can never be pure,²⁹ in the sense of fully severed from the realm of the useful, but, as the chapter on Walser's *Leistungsroman* argues for instance,

²⁷ See also David Wellbery's critique of Guillory (and of Herrnstein Smith and Bourdieu) for how they "replace the dead-end discourse on aesthetic value with economic value" and his argument for Kantian aesthetic evaluation not as a claim to a sort of imperialistic universality rooted in a spurious subjectivity – as the charge against Kant goes – but as a form of articulation with a different kind of normativity. Wellbery, "Evaluation as Articulation: A Defense of Kant on Literary Value," 193.

²⁸ John Guillory, *Cultural Capital*, 317.

²⁹ For a recent attempt to develop 'non-pure' vernacular aesthetic categories premised not on 'the beautiful' but on "clashing" and "equivocal" feelings and judgments see Sianne Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories*.

certain forms of use or praxis can, through recourse to the aesthetic or the literary, wrestle some form of value away from what might otherwise seem to be dominant value-imperatives of the economy. If the literary texts discussed here insist on their value as irreducible to the economic, they do so only in conscious conjunction with it; this distinguishes them from autonomy aesthetics even as they may stake a claim to a kind of literary autonomy. Unlike in Richard T. Gray's study, there is no "economic unconscious" at work in these texts – the economy is on the surface,³⁰ what lies below is a problem of meaning.

Guillory's point that "there is a discourse of aesthetics long before there is any conception of aesthetic value," recalls the fact that the concept of value enters the equation only when one sphere or object is compared to another. In this regard, aesthetic value is not really aesthetics, or, as Guillory puts it, in a more pronounced fashion, "the point is precisely that the comparison of authors or works to one another need not [. . .] be expressed as the comparison of their relative 'aesthetic values,' because neither the concept of the aesthetic, nor the concept of value, are as yet defined in such a way that they can be yoked together" (303): whereas aesthetics emerges as a discourse on the training of sensory perception, inaugurated with Alexander Baumgarten in the mid-eighteenth century as part of an exercise analogous to rational understanding,³¹ talk of aesthetic value is an import from British and French discourses on taste, in which what is at stake is, as La Rouchefoucauld writes of good taste at the end of the 17th century, the ability to "evaluat[e] each thing [. . .] appreciate its full value" [donner le prix a

³⁰ Cf. Richard T. Gray, *Money Matters: Economics and the Cultural Imagination*, 7.

³¹ While there has recently been much emphasis on pre-Kantian aesthetics as a science of sense perception (and not as a genealogy of aesthetics in treatises on taste), some recent philosophers of aesthetics such as Christoph Menke see both the acts of evaluation that taste implies *and* the acts of sensory perception as analogous to thought as products of a certain disciplinary regime of bourgeois civil society in the 18th century. See for instance Christoph Menke, "Ein anderer Geschmack. Weder Autonomie noch Massenkonsum;" Menke, "Die Disziplin der Ästhetik ist die Ästhetik der Disziplin. Baumgarten in der Perspektive Foucaults."

chaque chose, qui en connaît toute la valeur”].³² In this regard, it seems surprising that Kant’s *Kritik der Urteilskraft* (1790), largely credited with founding an autonomous notion of aesthetic value and arguing for the distinctness of aesthetic judgment, excises value from the sphere of the aesthetic altogether.³³ In the *Third Critique*, value is presented as solely a practical matter, i.e., a moral issue and fully alien to the type of pleasure (“Wohlgefallen”) Kant wants to attribute to a judgment of taste in his analytic of the beautiful: “Das Angenehme, das Schöne, das Gute bezeichnen also drei verschiedene Verhältnisse der Vorstellungen zum Gefühl der Lust und Unlust, in Beziehung auf welches wir Gegenstände oder Vorstellungsarten von einander unterscheiden [. . .] Angenehm heißt jemandem daß, was ihn vergnügt; schön, was ihm bloß gefällt; gut, was geschätzt, gebilligt, d.i. worin von ihm ein objektiver Wert gesetzt wird.”³⁴ Value, as Kant sees it in the third critique, is the product of a value judgment, i.e. a moral deliberation, and not part of the ‘mere pleasure’ provoked by beauty, which if it is to have value at all, would, in the Kantian framework, have to be rooted in the subject’s “ansinnen” of other’s consent.³⁵

In the history of the German aesthetic tradition, one of the first formulations of aesthetic value thus comes not in the *Third Critique* but in the work of Karl Philipp Moritz. Up until philosophers and writers like Karl Philipp Moritz and Immanuel Kant lay the groundwork for an autonomy aesthetics at the end of the eighteenth century, the arts, writes Martha Woodmansee, “had been perceived as intervening directly in human life—as imparting and empowering

³² “Taste” in La Rochefoucauld, *Collected Maxims and other Reflections* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 219-218. See also Christoph Menke, “Ein anderer Geschmack. Weder Autonomie noch Massenkonsum,” esp. 228.

³³ On this problem of aesthetic value see Gérard Genette, “What Aesthetic Values?” in Gérard Genette, *Essays in Aesthetics*, 29-47.

³⁴ Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der Urteilskraft*, 56.

³⁵ Where Kant does speak of aesthetic value, in paragraph 53, it is not about the autonomous validity of a judgment of taste. Value enters the equation when comparison is at stake; it serves the purpose of distinguishing and ranking the various fine arts on the basis of their respective merits.

beliefs, as communicating truths [. . .] in a pleasing form—and their value and excellence as works of art had been measured *instrumentally* in terms of their success [. . .] in serving these broad human purposes.”³⁶ Through the aesthetic debates between Gottsched and Breitinger around the middle of the eighteenth century – that in many ways first begin to address the value of literature – and up to the Enlightenment aesthetics of Mendelssohn or Lessing, a Horatian heritage continued to exert its influence on notions of what art was and what it was worth: art educated, entertained, and moved an audience; good art was art that exhibited formal perfection or worked on the perfectibility of humans.³⁷ With the rise of autonomy aesthetics, however, art becomes, as Woodmansee formulates it with regards to Moritz, “a discrete realm of ultimate purpose,” “a perfectly self-sufficient totality that exists to be contemplated disinterestedly” (Woodmansee, 12). And its value becomes “*intrinsic*” (italics in original).

The disentanglement of aesthetic value from function, from a world of external purposes, a nexus of utilitarian relations, that begins to occur with Moritz’ emphasis on the work of art as an end in itself and – though tellingly he never speaks of aesthetic value in this sense – Kant’s emphasis on beauty’s purposiveness without purpose, is in fact less a severing of aesthetic from instrumental value as it is an articulation of art in terms of *value* at all. Indeed, the “radical departure from the two millennia of theorizing about the arts” that Woodmansee sees in Moritz *Versuch* can be measured in the fact that Moritz speaks of (aesthetic) value only in order to distinguish a beautiful work from a utilitarian object or non-aesthetic object – the mechanical work such as a clock or a knife – which has, Moritz writes, “keinen eigenthümlichen Wert”

³⁶ Woodmansee, *Author, Art, and the Market*, 12. Woodmansee’s italics.

³⁷ On how Mendelssohn bridges perfection as it is thought in the Rationalist paradigm of Wolff and Leibniz up to Baumgarten and German classicism’s idea of perfectability, see Kai Hammermeister, *The German Aesthetic Tradition*.

whatsoever.³⁸ The intrinsic value of the aesthetic, supposed to be irreducible to the artwork's cognitive, moral, economic, or otherwise practical value, is, however, intrinsic and indeed a value *sui generis* only in relation to a sphere of utility, which includes objects that have less a 'value' than a 'use.' If beauty is precisely what is not useful to its observer, it follows that the value attributed to an aesthetic object in Moritz' framework is tied to the observer's selfless ("uneigennützig") desire to revere ("huldigen") rather than consume the beauty of the object.

The emphatic articulation of an intrinsic value of art occurs, therefore, precisely at the moment emphasized in Jean Paul's typology of audience members: the moment when the criteria of art's value are simultaneously relegated to a "Kauf-Publikum." As is well documented, by Woodmansee and others, the autonomy of aesthetic value is accompanied historically in Germany by the emergence of a mass literary public and an increasingly consolidated printing culture and market for the proliferation and sale of works of art, especially literary ones.³⁹ When Goethe's *Die Leiden des jungen Werther* (1774) becomes an overnight bestseller, it becomes clear: autonomous literature is up for sale. The intrinsic quality of aesthetic value is thus at the very moment of its first articulations in the final decades of the eighteenth century, haunted by the valuation of art in an extrinsic market sphere, which art, if it is to have aesthetic value at all, must paradoxically acknowledge and disavow at the same time – acknowledge, because the concept of value, as Moritz's remarks clarify, depends on the comparison of competing spheres and works; and disavow because the concept of autonomous value at the same time represses this dependency. And this means that art's value will be defined *ex negativo*, as invaluable, as that

³⁸ Karl Philipp Moritz, "Versuch einer Vereinigung aller schönen Künste" in *Schriften zur Ästhetik und Poetik*, 4.

³⁹ This is the main point of Woodmansee's study, especially her chapter on Moritz, "The Interest in Disinterestedness." On a related note, i.e. not in terms of aesthetic value but in terms of the exemplarity of art, in the face of a rising literate public and the danger of mediocrity this situation entails see Paul Fleming, *Exemplarity and Mediocrity*.

which has no exchange value, i.e. as art's claim to a kind of validity, a kind of value, *sui generis*.⁴⁰

The argument of this dissertation is, in this context, not that “art was invented to stem the commercialization of literature,” as Woodmansee suggests, but, inversely, that the economization of literature produces a different kind of art. Put differently, the point is not that aesthetic autonomy requires a discourse of (economic) value but that the discourse of economic value – in the literary text, at least – is a discourse on whatever might or might not be aesthetic autonomy.

The Superfluous Value of Prose

Taken to its extreme, the antithetical aspect of art's invaluableness becomes absolute and threatens to lapse into worthlessness, sterility, or insignificance. The problem arising from this dynamic forms the second premise of this study. As Goethe will suggest allegorically through the figure of the “Knabe Lenker” in the famous *Mummenschanz* scene of *Faust II*, poetry becomes, by this logic (an art that sells), “Verschwendung:” “Bin der Poet, der sich vollendet/ Wenn er sein eigenst Gut verschwendet.” Against the market's law of value, poetic literature takes the Bataillian path: it becomes expenditure; its perfection (“Vollendung”) no longer its internal coherence as a hermetic seal against the nexus of utilitarian relations but an auto-

⁴⁰ See Bourdieu on Flaubert for an extension of the problem into the second half of the nineteenth century: “The symbolic revolution through which artists free themselves from bourgeois demand by refusing to recognize any master except their art produces the effect of making the market disappear. In fact they could not triumph over the 'bourgeois' in the struggle for control of the meaning and function of artistic activity without at the same time eliminating the bourgeois as a potential customer. At the moment when they argue, with Flaubert, that ‘a work of art [. . .] is beyond appraisal, has no commercial value, cannot be paid for,’ that it is *without price*, that is to say, foreign to the ordinary logic of the ordinary economy, they discover that it is effectively *without commercial value*, that it has no market. The ambiguity of Flaubert's phrase, saying two things at once, leads to the uncovering of a sort of infernal mechanism, which is set up by artists and in which they find themselves caught: making a necessity of their virtue, they can always be suspected of making a virtue of necessity.” Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art*, 81.

affective act of waste. This is, indeed, the flipside of literary autonomy, as Werner Hamacher has suggested in his reading of Goethe's *Faust*:

Bloße Literatur zu werden, das war die Gefahr, der sich die Literatur am Anfang ihrer frühen Moderne ausgesetzt sah. Nicht bloß auf dem Papier zu stehen, sondern dem Leben, seinen Affekten und individuellen Regungen zum Ausdruck zu verhelfen, um selber ins Leben eingreifen zu können, diese Absicht charakterisierte den frühen Expressionismus, mit dem sich die deutsche Literatur in der zweiten Hälfte des achtzehnten Jahrhunderts von den Musterpoetiken ihrer Tradition und vom drückenden Vorbild der klassizistischen Nachbarliteraturen zu emanzipieren versuchte.⁴¹

Autonomy, in this regard, not only marks an emancipation from the weight of authoritative poetic models or imitation imperatives, but, as Hamacher suggests in a reading of the paper money scene in Goethe's *Faust II* with regard to a (capitalist) law of value, a loss of credit. The consequence of this emancipation is a literature mired in the paradox of its own groundlessness, indeed in the "Unverlässlichkeit, Unbeständigkeit und Wertlosigkeit" of its words, something to which the Faustian contract with the devil attests as a "Vertrag zwischen Unverträglichem" that in a Nietzschean manner, reveals only the impossibility of vouching for oneself or actually giving what one promises (134). The word that literature gives will have to, as Hamacher argues for the semiotics of the paper money issued by the "Kaiser" in Goethe's play, depend for its value on an act of self-accreditation that would, like the public credit that serves as a "Credo des Kapitals" in Marx's analysis of primitive accumulation,⁴² guarantee value only insofar as it rests on an original debt and makes this debt into the substance of a *Credo* that is constantly at risk of

⁴¹ Werner Hamacher, "Faust, Geld," *Athenäum: Jahrbuch Für Romantik* 4 (January, 1994): 131.

⁴² "Der einzige Teil des sogenannten Nationalreichtums, der wirklich in den Gesamtbesitz der modernen Völker eingeht, ist – ihre Staatsschuld. Daher ganz konsequent die moderne Doktrin, daß ein Volk umso reicher wird, je tiefer es sich verschuldet. Der öffentliche Kredit wird zum Credo des Kapitals. Und mit dem Entstehen der Staatsverschuldung tritt an die Stelle der Sünde gegen den heiligen Geist, für die keine Verzeihung ist, der Treubruch an der Staatsschuld. Die öffentliche Schuld wird einer der energischsten Hebel der ursprünglichen Akkumulation. Wie mit dem Schlag der Wünschelrute begabt sie das unproduktive Geld mit Zeugungskraft und verwandelt es so in Kapital [. . .] Die Staatsgläubiger geben in Wirklichkeit nichts, denn die geliehene Summe wird in öffentliche leicht übertragbare Schuldscheine verwandelt, die in ihren Händen fortfungieren, ganz als wären sie ebensoviel Bargeld." Karl Marx, *Das Kapital*, 782-783.

unwinding.

In a perhaps slightly more positive manner, Jochen Hörisch has described this particular economy of a literature no longer ‘backed’, as it were, by the substance of, say, a *Regelpoetik* as a possibility rather than liability for literature:

Schöne Literatur ist stets von dem Verdacht umgeben, funktional überflüssig zu sein . . . Das Überflüssige aber ist auch das, was im Überfluß lebt und sich deshalb leisten kann, was andere sich versagen müssen. Literatur begreift sich schon früh und verstärkt seit dem 16. Jahrhundert als das Medium, das die Probleme der Deckung nicht hat und diese Probleme gerade deshalb umso besser beobachten kann. Denn Dichtung stellt gar nicht erst den Anspruch, ihre Aussagen seien gedeckt. Dichtung ist eben Fiktion: sie muß nicht durch wirkliche Ereignisse oder durch Realien gedeckt sein.⁴³

For the purposes of this study, this desubstantialization of value and literature means that literature, if it is to articulate its value at all, must necessarily generate the form in which its value can be articulated. This, I argue, is what the economic topos of *Überfluss* in Tieck, *Schuldenverkehr* in Keller, and *Leistung* in Walser does. Just as Jean Paul’s preface provides the economic framework in which his literature can stake its claim to value – how can literature’s value as irreducible to the accountant’s double-entry arithmetic be expressed without the set-up of the *comptoir*? – so too do the literary texts in discussion here imagine their value in the economic terms they themselves provide. Structurally, then, the poetic problem of literary value calls not for a grounding of value in the normative schema of canonization,⁴⁴ of a literary axiology or *Wertung*,⁴⁵ or concept of the work as a transmitter of other values,⁴⁶ but for what

⁴³ Jochen Hörisch, *Kopf oder Zahl*, 19-20. See also Hörisch’s reading of Goethe’s *Mummenschanz* scene as a “Hermeneutik des Mangels” in *Kopf oder Zahl*, 184-189.

⁴⁴ See Guillory, *Cultural Capital*. Gayatri Spivak points to the problems of a literary axiology and raising the question of value in literary criticism, which, as she suggests, “surfaces [. . .] with reference to canon-formation,” in Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Scattered Speculations on the Question of Value,” 74.

⁴⁵ See Jochen Schulte-Sasse, *Literarische Wertung*. Barbara Herrnstein Smith offers the most substantial critique of what she calls “axiological logic” at stake in theories of judgment, taste, and evaluation. Her solution is to show value to be contingent in the sense of the product of multiple variables: “All value is radically contingent, being neither a fixed attribute, an inherent quality, or an objective property of things

Hans Blumenberg has called, in a different context, an “immanente Poetik”.⁴⁷ In other words, if literary value can be grounded at all, such grounding will occur in and as form.⁴⁸

The Value Form as Method (Marx, Simmel)

Form in this sense, and the value form as a concept that shapes this dissertation’s inquiry, relies on Marx’s definition of the *Wertform* in the first volume of *Das Kapital* (1867), a text that can be credited (along with Nietzsche’s *Zur Genealogie der Moral* [1887]) with the most substantial discussion of value in the nineteenth century. The concept of the value *form* marks in a single word what makes Marx’s text a critique rather than just another variant of bourgeois political economy and distinguishes his from other labor-theories of value (in the vein of Ricardo or Say). Marx’s inquiry into the value form shifts the emphasis in the question of value from substance (what is value? Where does it come from? How is it measured?) to function and to the pivotal question, “warum dieser Inhalt jene Form annimmt, warum sich also die Arbeit im Wert [. . .] darstellt.”⁴⁹ Marx’s pivotal discovery was not the category of value itself, nor the labor

but, rather, an effect of multiple, continuously changing, and continuously interacting variables.” *Contingencies of Value*, 30.

⁴⁶ See for instance Terry Eagleton, “Marxism and Aesthetic Value” in *Criticism and Ideology*: “Literary value is a phenomenon which is *produced* in that ideological appropriation of the text, that ‘consumptional production’ of the work, which is the act of reading. It is always *relational* value: ‘exchange-value’” (166-167).

⁴⁷ Hans Blumenberg, “Sprachsituation und immanente Poetik” in *Ästhetische und Metaphorologische Schriften*, esp. 122.

⁴⁸ This is a slightly different point than claiming that literature’s engagement with the economic is part of its self-reflectivity. If literature, as Blumenberg has suggested, can problematize precisely what a given epoch considers “das Selbstverständlichste und Trivialste,” “was auszusprechen [. . .] nicht der Mühe wert wird,” and in this way critically engage an epoch’s dominant sense of what reality is, literature can also form a kind of self-evidence where there is none. See also Eva Geulen and Peter Geimer, “Was leistet Selbstreflexivität in Kunst, Literatur und ihren Wissenschaften?”

⁴⁹ Marx, *Das Kapital*, 95. This discussion of the value form in Marx is indebted to remarks by and conversation with Christoph Menke in Frankfurt, Germany. The remarks were made in a roundtable discussion at a symposium entitled *The Value of Critique* held in Frankfurt’s Städelschule on January 19, 2017. Video of the roundtable can be found here: <http://www.normativeorders.net/de/69-veranstaltungen/5150-roundtable-labour-and-value>. The conversation took place in Bistro Aida in Frankfurt’s Westend.

theory of value, but rather the social form in which value is expressed. Analyzing the value form allows Marx, in contrast to the labor theories of value proffered by Smith or Ricardo, to pose the question of how value forms labor-power into a social commodity, rather than the question of how labor constitutes value. What Marx discovered is that value is, first and foremost, a social relation, and neither just a quantity of labor congealed in a commodity nor a subject's projection (of pleasure or displeasure) onto a good. Because value is always only given in formal expression and as a relation between signs, the language it speaks is a kind of "gesellschaftliche Hieroglyphe;" value knows only "form of appearance" ["Erscheinungsform"] and has *qua* representation or "Darstellung," a "gespenstische Gegenständlichkeit." Marx's value form renders, in other words, value transitive and representational; not in the sense that value is purely differential or semiological,⁵⁰ the product of an interplay of substitutions,⁵¹ but in the sense that the value form abstractly indexes a historically specific social practice (the comparison of commodities as products of labor, even if the commodity is money). In this regard, the value form is not only the product of a practice of evaluation (exchange) but itself productive of what can count (in what constellation) as value at all. The value form is thus the production of those formal parameters through which a thing, a commodity, a literary text can express its value or address value in the first place. To put it concretely: when Gottfried Keller writes of

⁵⁰ Saussure suggests this dimension of value connects linguistics and political economy. See for instance his example of the value of a coin as determined by similarity and dissimilarity within a given system in Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, esp. 135.

⁵¹ Jean-Joseph Goux makes this the basis of his study of the 'general equivalent' in Jean-Joseph Goux, *Symbolic Economies*. "Now the notion of value, whether for exchange, compensation, indemnification, purchasing, or repurchasing, is implied in every replacement. Whether this exchange involves comparison, substitution, supplementation – or translation and representation – value enters into it. Value is presupposed by formal identity and by indemnity, even if no real permutation, no give-and-take trade actually makes the substitution of equivalents visible; even if no barter, no circulation, no apparent bargaining dramatizes the counterbalancing and Supplementary in all senses and all registers of the word, the interplay of signs, objects, and symptoms as governed by values—exchange-values. These values—whether linguistic, commercial, sexual, or legal—may be seen in the interplay of 'substitutive formations,' in the 'in the place of' structure that inheres in every sign in general" (9-10).

Schuldenverkehr, this ‘value form’ will act as the medium (for Keller specifically) in which literary value – as the question of poetic transfiguration, the realist ‘valorization’ of the marginal, excluded, or unnecessary, the question of what is worth writing – can be articulated. And, furthermore, *Schuldenverkehr* will elucidate the specifically literary logic of stories of fortune or *Glück*, which, Keller’s novella suggests, can only be told with a remainder, a debt left uncollected, an obligation unfulfilled, a concatenation, conjuncture, or *Fügung*, in Keller’s words, that can never quite balance the books. In this context, the methodology of this dissertation is a kind of *value formalism*. The emphasis on form in this dissertation – and indeed much of this study’s approach to the relation between aesthetic and commodity value – is indebted to Adorno’s well-known dictum: “Die ungelösten Antagonismen der Realität kehren wieder in den Kunstwerken als die immanenten Probleme ihrer Form. Das, nicht der Einschuss gegenständlicher Momente, definiert das Verhältnis der Kunst zur Gesellschaft.”⁵² The value form of literature is in this sense a mediation of reality’s unresolved antagonisms (for instance the antagonism between the work of art and other forms of work, or what Keller will describe as a ‘right’ to the poetic and the literary in the age of the locomotive). But what Adorno wants to exclude from the equation (objective moments or ‘content’), this study doesn’t – or rather this study treats form as Adorno will define it in a different constellation: as “sedimentierter Inhalt” (15). Content matters; yet, as Marx’s concept of the value form demonstrates, it does so only as a “*spectral* objectivity,” that is, as a “Gegenständlichkeit” without substance, as it were; rooted, as it is, in a social practice which can never quite appear as such.

Finally, the value form describes not only how literature addresses what it is worth, but also plays an integral role in the production of meaning. Any relation between literature and the

⁵² Theodor Adorno, *Ästhetische Theorie*, 16.

economic, this study argues, must be located in the relation between meaning-production and value.⁵³ In addition, then, to Marx's value form, this study draws on Georg Simmel's notion of value as a crucial dimension of what constitutes "Bedeutsamkeit." For Simmel, "Bedeutsamkeit" derives from a relation to objects of desire that resist being had: "*So ist es nicht deshalb schwierig, die Dinge zu erlangen, weil sie wertvoll sind, sondern wir nennen diejenigen wertvoll, die unserer Begehrung, sie zu erlangen, Hemmnisse entgegensetzen.*"⁵⁴ Meaning

[*Bedeutsamkeit*] – as something different than sense [*Sinn*] – is the result of an accrual of value

⁵³ This distances this study from others such as Joseph Vogl's that locate the relation between the economic and the literary on the level of 'knowledge.' The economic trope in the texts studied here is less about literature's epistemological contribution to an 'order of knowledge' about the economy than it is an attempt to trace literature's own formal or poetic response to the economic. The emphasis on form here is meant to win back a bit of what Vogl has to exclude, namely a relation between form and content: "Die Möglichkeit einer Beziehung zwischen Literatur und Ökonomie [. . .] liegt nicht in einer Widerspiegelung, sie liegt weder in einem Abbildsverhältnis noch in einer Beziehung von Text und Kontext oder in einer Relation zwischen Stoff und Form. Die Konjunktion von 'Literatur' und 'Ökonomie' verfolgt hier vielmehr den Zweck, das Wissenssubstrat poetischer Gattungen und die poetische Durchdringung von Wissensformen aufeinander zu beziehen und beide damit im Milieu ihrer Geschichtlichkeit festzuhalten." Joseph Vogl, *Kalkül und Leidenschaft*, 14. The emphasis on forms of *knowledge* leads Vogl to describe the economy and literature as two modes of representing or ordering empirical subjects and things, both participants in an order of knowledge or discursive field primarily concerned with the organization, ordering, and 'steering' of people and goods. While the figure of 'Steuerung' – which appears more than seventy times in Vogl's study – certainly captures much of what German *Polizeiwissenschaft* was about and how a certain dispositive of contingency management operated in theories and praxes of literature up to 1800, the primacy of this cybernetic reading tends – perhaps in the wake of Foucault's *Order of Things* – to locate its intervention solely on the level of *Darstellung* or representation (but not in the sense of *Abbildung*) and medialization (i.e. graphs, charts, semiotic systems, instruments, etc.), making at times a rather stringent decision in advance on the relation between literature and economy, as Rüdiger Campe has suggested. Campe writes: "In its involvement with the relationship between literature and scientific discourses, however, a 'poetics of knowledge' tends to have critics assuming that they already know what literature is, and how literature is distinct from, and relates to, scientific discourse. The general doctrine of the 'poetics of knowledge' is representation. Literature, according to this doctrine, is first and essentially representation, whereas knowledge is articulated in specific discursive fields. Accordingly, the 'poetics of knowledge' addresses the following questions: how does literature incorporate specific discursive fields in its general play of representation? To which extent are epistemic discourses already forms of representation in themselves? And, finally, in which ways do representation and scientific discourses contribute to an exchange between literary representation and epistemic discourse, both in literature and in science?" Rüdiger Campe, "Body and Time: Thomas Mann's *Zauberberg*," 231. This study, while it also emphasizes representation, attempts to avoid assimilating literature's representation of the economic to a given relation between science and literature, opting instead to see *Darstellung* or the 'poetic' as a 'practical' response to the determination of value by the economic.

⁵⁴ Georg Simmel, *Philosophie des Geldes*, 35.

that for its part results from a kind of resistance or difficulty. In this regard, one could say value is also the result of a kind of reality principle, of a run-in with prosaic reality that is all the more meaningful for the difficulties it causes for literature.⁵⁵ In the context of this study, the value form points to the procedures of generating meaning that result from literature's difficult encounter with the economic. In Tieck, in particular, a (non-Romantic) value and meaning will emerge through the difficulties which material reality poses to an aesthetic imagination that would have rather just projected its own value onto the world.

Überfluss, Schuldenverkehr, Leistung

This study brings the question of literature's talk and form of value to bear on texts by Ludwig Tieck, Gottfried Keller, and Robert Walser, all composed in a period from the 1830s to the early twentieth century, after the 'end of the Goethean *Kunstperiode*' (Heinrich Heine). If German Classicism and Goethe in many ways papered over the fact that the value of German-language literature was not self-evident – either through attempts to ground a classical national literature or through appeals to the singular originality of the author – the end of the *Kunstperiode* also marks a new void in what literature is worth. If Goethe's works were invaluable, where and what should be the measure of value for any serious literary work that comes in their wake? This is in many ways a symbolic question. With the exception of Heine, writers of German-language prose after 1832 do not tend to *explicitly* position themselves and their works vis-à-vis Goethe. But in Tieck, Keller, and Walser, for instance, the questions and

⁵⁵ See also Blumenberg on this point in Simmel: "Bedeutsamkeit entsteht auch durch die Darstellung des Verhältnisses zwischen dem Widerstand, den die Wirklichkeit dem Leben entgegensetzt, und der Aufbringung der Energie, die ihm gewachsen macht. [. . .] Wert ist eine funktionale Spezifikation von Bedeutsamkeit, die auf die Objektivierung des Vergleichs und damit der Tauschbarkeit tendiert, ohne je das subjektive Moment ganz preiszugeben, das im 'empfundenen' Wert des Begehrten steckt." Blumenberg ties this to Sisyphus's mythical futility from whom one can learn "was es ausmacht nicht nur von Wirklichkeit, und nicht nur von *einer* dazu, okkupiert und besessen zu sein, sondern eines moderaten Realismus zu genießen." Hans Blumenberg, *Arbeit am Mythos*, 87.

forms of value that are invoked tend not only to be borrowed from the repertoire of economic problems that Goethe, the first to raise the question of literary value, as Jochen Hörisch has suggested,⁵⁶ addresses in his works. Perhaps more importantly, the works by Tieck, Keller, and Walser addressed in this study respond to a structural problem that Heine names the ‘end of the Goethean Kunstperiode’: if Goethe’s masterpieces possessed an indisputable “selbständigen Wert,” they have since become impotent (“unfruchtbar”),⁵⁷ an ornament for German literature but no longer a source of value. The literature that follows Goethe’s will have to produce its own value rather than symbolically rely on the ground of value Goethe’s works provided. With Foucault, one could say, “Value has ceased to be a sign, it has become a product.”⁵⁸ This is true for the period following Goethe in another sense as well. The latter half of the nineteenth century to the beginning of the twentieth century is a period defined in a particularly marked way by discussions of value, from Marx’s first inquiries into a capitalist value form to Nietzsche’s “Umwertung aller Werte” to Georg Simmel’s *Philosophie des Geldes* (1900), with its substantial discussion of value, to Weber’s program of *Wertfreiheit* and the discussions around the role of a fact/value distinction in the human sciences, to the value philosophies of Max Scheler and other axiologies in phenomenology and *Lebensphilosophie*, following in the wake of *Kulturpessimismus*. Moreover, it is a time in which a capitalist regime of value becomes consolidated and disseminated, from the introduction of *Gewerbefreiheit* in Prussia in 1810 to

⁵⁶ Jochen Hörisch, “Werther stellt die Wertfrage - Zur Ökonomie der Werte in Goethes Bestseller” in *Man muss dran glauben*, 95-108. See also Fritz Gutbrodt, “The Worth of Werther: Goethe’s Literary Marketing,” *MLN* 110, no. 3 (1995): 579–630. “In the second half of the eighteenth century subjectivist conceptions of value became increasingly important for the emergence of a diverse market economy, and it is no accident that *Werther*, a novel that unfolds the drama of overestimating the worth of subjectivity, should articulate eighteenth-century speculations on economic, aesthetic, and moral values in the name of its protagonist” (581).

⁵⁷ Heinrich Heine, *Die Romantische Schule*, 154-155.

⁵⁸ Foucault, *The Order of Things*, 277.

the massive industrialization of Germany in the course of the nineteenth century, the boom and bust of the *Gründerjahre* up to the inflation of Weimar Germany, against a backdrop of a shift in economic thought from substantialist to functionalist conceptions of economic value, ranging from those rooted in human labor to those rooted in the human mind.

Focusing specifically on three central problems of value (lack and plenty or surplus and need; relations of credit and debt; and questions of merit, achievement, or performance), this dissertation argues that in the wake of Goethe – and working with many of the loci Goethe provides – a concern with the economy of prose and with something as prosaic as the economy serves German-language literature as a means to both grapple with literature’s relation to everyday life (the central problem of prosaic art) and reflect on the value of literature as art, as commodity, as work. The economy of prose in this regard is in form as well as in content the figure through which literature reflects its own worth. Borrowed from Marx’s conceptual arsenal for describing value’s ‘ghostly objectivity,’ the term value form or “Wertform,” which gives this study its title, names the way in which an economic motif becomes linked to a formal concern with literature’s value. Yet unlike, for instance, the literary field that Pierre Bourdieu describes in great detail as a “locus where belief in the value of art – and in that power to create value which belongs to the artist – is constantly produced and reproduced,”⁵⁹ the value forms at the center of this study (surplus or *Überfluss*, credit and debt, *Leistung* and inventiveness) involve topoi of value that are, first of all, located in the literary work itself and, secondly, so intricately tied to questions of literary form that the sociological perspective for which Bourdieu advocates would fall short.⁶⁰ The accounting office or *Kontor* in Jean Paul’s preface offers a good example in this

⁵⁹ Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art*, 292.

⁶⁰ “Questions of the meaning and value of the work of art, like the question of the specificity of aesthetic judgement, can only find solutions in a social history of the field, linked to a sociology of the conditions

regard. As an actual locus of economic value into which the literary author Jean Paul enters to reflect on his position vis-à-vis different ideal types of readers (and consumers) of his work, the *comptoir* is not only a sign of the industry of letters; it indexes not only, say, the uneasy relation between the aesthetic ambitions of the poet and the utilitarian calculus of the accountant. More to the point, it provides the motif of accounting for value (and meanings) Jean Paul (wittily) exploits to expose the semantic surpluses that result from the transactions of the mind that literature provokes. In other words: this study poses a problem of form for which the analytics of the philologist are as crucial as those of the sociologist.

The first chapter, “Superfluous Prose (Tieck),” begins by explicating the economy of prose in an analysis of Novalis’ reading of Goethe’s *Wilhelm Meister’s Lehrjahre*. For Novalis, *Meister* announces an “economic gospel” that threatens to lead to art’s self-destruction. This chapter frames discussions of the tension between prose and poetry around 1800 in the context of this economic gospel, arguing that the self-destruction of poetic art by the prosaic, which Novalis names the crux of Goethe’s economic gospel, can be understood as a problem of literary valorization or *Wertbildung*, one lodged at the heart of Romantic notions of the work of art and the economy. The chapter then turns to the uptake of this problem in the nineteenth-century novella, analyzing, in this context, how Ludwig Tieck’s novella *Des Lebens Überfluß* (1837) conjoins the prose-poetry problem to an economic one: the relation between need and surplus (*Bedürfnis* and *Überfluss* in Tieck’s words) or lack and plenty. Situated between Romanticism

of the constitution of the particular disposition which the field calls for in each of its states. [. . .] But in the infinite regress towards the primary cause and the ultimate foundation of the work of art's value, one must stop somewhere. And in order to explain this sort of miracle of transubstantiation which is the source of the work of art's existence - and which, though commonly forgotten, is brutally recalled through moves à la Duchamp - one must replace the ontological question with the historical question of the genesis of the universe in which the value of the work of art is ceaselessly produced and reproduced in a veritable continuous creation - that is, the artistic field.” Bourdieu, *Rules of Art*, 290-291.

and Realism, *Des Lebens Überfluß* conjures eighteenth-century and early nineteenth-century discourses on luxury in moral philosophy (from the extravagant uselessness of the diamond in political economy to that of literature in debates about *Leseluxus*) in order to address the fate of the Romantic imagination in the context of utterly prosaic economic need. The problem of prose's value is literalized in Tieck's novella, which documents how a last-resort Romantic attempt to turn the lack of poetry in a prosaic world into surplus runs up against value's *sine qua non*: finitude, or concretely in Tieck's text, insolvency. Turning lack to plenty – not incidentally a central desideratum in Tieck's notion of the *Wunder* – succeeds in Tieck's novella only with the right “Zusammenhang,” something that – figured in the novella as a staircase (idealism), a book of prose (actual prose), and ultimately finance capital (the poetic or marvelous prosaic) – the literary text alone can provide.

Chapter two, “*Schuldenverkehr*: Conjunctures of Fortune in Keller” addresses ethical and material economies of value in Gottfried Keller's collection of novellas *Die Leute von Seldwyla* (Part One 1856; Part Two 1874). Keller's novellas merge two master terms in discussions of value in the nineteenth century, debt and exchange (social, communicative, commercial), in the composite *Schuldenverkehr*, making transactions of credit and debt into a central topos of the Realist text. Keller's stories of insolvency, bankruptcy, indebtedness, etc., which in a riff on their theological and economic motifs I call *Fallgeschichten*, operate not according to a principle of transfiguration or *Verklärung* but, like Tieck's novella, one of *Verwertung*, picking up and valorizing what falls out of circulation or is expended in what Keller calls the “Kreislauf der Dinge.” This chapter turns specifically to Keller's novella *Kleider machen Leute* (1874) to analyze the narrative construction of fortune (in the double sense of wealth and luck or *Glück*). Closest to discourse analysis (and a version of ideology critique), this chapter reads Keller's

story together with Nietzsche's and Marx's writings on credit and debt as part of a 'transvaluation of values' (Nietzsche) that ties ethical to material values and shows how the bourgeois narrative of fortune rests on a conjuncture or "Fügung" that is not godly (i.e. deus ex machina) but contingent in way that leaves a structure of credit and debt in tact.

Chapter three, "Performance and Invention: Robert Walser's *Leistungsroman*" argues for what I call the *Leistungsroman* as Walser's particular response to the modern novel, and specifically the *Bildungsroman*. In an analysis of Walser's *Der Gehülfe* (1908) as a paradigmatic instance of the *Leistungsroman* I track a division of labor between invention and performance that characterizes the novel's account of the economy of technical and literary invention. Walser's *Leistungsroman* is centered around various types of clerical assistants – including Walser himself – who, unable to invent in their own name and subjected to an imperative to perform ("etwas zu leisten"), develop a set of responses and practices that capitulate to and put pressure on the value demands on their work. In this regard the *Leistungsroman* is both a document of a kind of alienation and a (weak) attempt at the transvaluation of the value of human and literary productivity by reconfiguring the novel's relation to work, action, and invention.

One of the guiding arguments of this dissertation is that talk of economic value in literature is not simply one kind of statement in a larger discourse network of political economy. Nor is it a way of sanctioning or generating representational and practical modes through which a discourse of value congeals. First and foremost, this study argues, talk of value in literary texts is talk of literature's own value, of literature's meaning-making procedures (its poetics) as ways of adding or producing value to the world. In this regard, the texts in discussion here posit a relationship between value and literary meaning, an economy of sense that stands in explicit

relation to what is conventionally understood as the economic. The works of Tieck, Keller, and Walser analyzed here offer particularly strong incidences of literature's reflection on its own value via recourse to the economic. The economic is not the only register through which these texts address literary value but the economic trope offers a privileged lens through which to view their addresses of value: the trope of need and overabundance in Tieck questions the value poetic literature might add to a prosaic reality seen as *poor* in meaning and subject to a bourgeois law of value that reduces ends to means and calculates worth in terms of a symbolic circulation of esteem; it also implicates an ethics, anthropology and hermeneutics of prosaic life in its value schema. Credit and debt in Keller similarly raise questions of transfiguration or *Verklärung* as questions of *Verwertung*: how one puts to use the resources one has at one's disposal in order to 'make' something of greater value. In doing so it also raises the issue of *ethos* and the estimation of character in moral economies. *Leistung* in Tieck concerns a clerk's performance on the job and is injected into a plot of insolvency that raises questions about the value of inventiveness and the possibility of an (undervalued) mode of literary practice. The aesthetic questions raised by these literary economies depend, moreover, on a deeper affinity between the literary and the economic in these texts, which can be seen in how economic concerns usher in specifically aesthetic ones. On this analogical level, the issue of lack and plenty translates aesthetically into the matters of stylistics, minimalism or ornamentation, austerity or extravagance, to-the-point or digressive narration; the issue of credit and debt raises questions of aesthetic semblance and deception, readerly acts of crediting a story as probable, suspending disbelief, or crediting a character; and the question of the work of invention versus the work of *Leistung* probes what type of work the work of art is, what sort of *techne* it involves, and also provokes questions of virtuosity and artlessness.

Like case studies, these chapters make local and specific points about texts by Tieck, Keller, and Walser, which also aim to highlight broader dimensions of their literary-historical moments. In this regard, this dissertation provides an account of how the problem of value or the relation between literature and economy is taken up in Romanticism, Realism, and Modernism, respectively. Moreover, by virtue of the methodological intervention this dissertation makes in studies of literary economies by reading across the fault lines of discourse analysis, new historicism, poetics of knowledge, poststructuralism, and new formalisms, these chapters indicate how concerns in literary theory in the last half-century are related to the problem of value: in addressing the superfluity of the poetic, the chapter on Tieck joins a logic of literature as supplement to relations of lack and surplus in an economic sense; the chapter on Keller brings issues of fictionalization and character, which have been addressed, for instance, by Barthes, but also questions of ritualistic exchange/payback, imitation, and the carnevellesque that thinkers like Bakhtin or Girard have addressed, to bear on relations of credit and debt; and the chapter on Walser points to a mode of operative inoperativity, which it calls *Fehl-Leistung*, as a response to theories of inoperativity as they shape a certain tradition of leftist poststructuralist theory (in Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy, Agamben, et al.).

Finally, the value forms that each chapter addresses are not easily isolated. While individual chapters focus largely on a single form or problem of value, others inevitably creep in, revealing more densely intertwined relations between individual foci in this dissertation. Credit and debt, for instance, plays a role in every text addressed in this study: from Keller's fictional 'paradise of credit' with its down-and-out debtors in *Die Leute von Seldwyla*, to the protagonist's discredited social status in Tieck's *Des Lebens Überfluss*, to the creditors that appear in the insolvent engineer's front yard to collect their outstanding debts in Walser's *Der Gehülfe*.

Indeed, the problem first arises in Jean Paul's preface with the merchant who is unable to be put asleep by Jean Paul's narration as long as he cannot stop thinking about debts he is owed. The issue of surplus or superfluous waste, to name a second focus, is a central problem not only in Tieck's novella but also in the prefaces to Keller's *Seldwyla* and to the extravagant expenditures in the Tobler mansion in Walser's novel. Finally, a concern with *Leistung* or performance forms the crux of Walser's *Der Gehülfe* but also haunts Tieck's protagonist and Keller's story of a mistaken count's performance of character in *Kleider machen Leute*.

Überfluss, Schuldenverkehr, Leistung – these, then, are the terms through which this study will address the value of literature and the form this value takes.

CHAPTER ONE

Superfluous Prose: Tieck's Last Romantic Gesture

“Die Frage ist: können wir das Überflüssige entbehren? Eine Antwort ist: nur dann wenn das Notwendige, den Bedürfnissen Genügende noch nicht glücklich macht”
Hans Blumenberg, *Theorie der Unbegrifflichkeit*

“Dans la société formée il n'y a pas de surabondant en aucun genre.”
“In der entwickelten Gellschaft gibt es überhaupt nichts Überflüssiges.”
Guillaume-François Le Trosne, quoted in Marx, *Das Kapital*

Exhausted Means

About forty years after Jean Paul drafts *Siebenkäs*, at the far end of Romanticism, the protagonist of Ludwig Tieck's novella *Des Lebens Überfluß* (1838) desperately looks to Jean Paul's humoristic eponymous character for a way out of his dire financial straits. In a remark to his wife upon assessing their bleak situation, he comments, “Du weißt, liebste Clara, wie sehr ich den *Siebenkäs* unsers Jean Paul liebe und verehere; wie dieser sein Humorist sich aber helfen würde, wenn er in unsrer Lage wäre, bleibt mir doch ein Rätsel. Nicht wahr, Liebchen, jetzt sind, so scheint es, alle Mittel erschöpft?”¹ Later in the story, when running low on firewood and food, Tieck's protagonist turns again to *Siebenkäs*: “wenn wir Millionärs wären wie jener *Siebenkäs*, dann wäre es keine Kunst, Holz anzuschaffen und selbst bessere Nahrung” (196). Exhausted, as it were, of all other means, Tieck's protagonist – an insolvent writer like Jean Paul's – turns here to art, to another literary author and another literary character (incidentally an *Armenadvokat*) for a way out of economic duress. In his recourse to Jean Paul, Tieck's protagonist most certainly did not have the preface to *Siebenkäs* in mind. Nevertheless, Tieck's novella picks up where Jean Paul's preface leaves off in addressing the economy and value of literature in an increasingly

¹ Ludwig Tieck, *Des Lebens Überfluss* in *Schriften*, 12:194. All further citations to this edition.

(over)saturated literary market: it ponders the status of the book in the age of the “Lesebibliothek” (Tieck, 249) and mass readership; the worth of the bourgeois author in a sea of dime novelists; as well as the viability of poetic fantasy and frivolousness of narrative fancy in the face of a bankrupt world of prose.

Tieck in fact spends much of his literary career wondering about the value of art and literature in the time of its commercialization, from his emphatic early Romantic manifestos of a *Kunstreligion* to the late Biedermeier novellas that address, in hardly oblique terms, the commercial market for original works by famous painters (*Wunderlichkeiten* [1836] and *Die Gemälde* [1821]), the real estate market (*Waldeinsamkeit* [1840], *Der Runenberg* [1804]), the dissolution of the guilds and capitalist organization of labor (*Der junge Tischlermeister* [1836]),² and, most explicitly, in the novella under discussion in this chapter: the autarky of an (invaluable) poetic existence shielded from the value system of a bourgeois prose of the world in *Des Lebens Überfluss*. Unlike Jean Paul, however, who with a great degree of irony brings his prose into the merchant’s comptoir, Tieck would seem, as his early collaboration with Wackenroder suggests, to want to drive art out of the market and into the temple: “Bildersäle werden betrachtet als Jahrmärkte, wo man neue Waren im Vorübergehen beurteilt, lobt und verachtet; und es sollten Tempel sein, wo man in stiller und schweigender Demut, und in herzerhebender Einsamkeit, die großen Künstler, als die höchsten unter den Irdischen, bewundern, und mit der langen unverwandten Betrachtung ihrer Werke, in dem Sonnenglanze der entzückendsten Gedanken und Empfindungen sich erwärmen möchte.”³ This reformulation and sacralization of disinterestedness, voiced by the “Friar” character in Tieck and

² For a larger analysis of this moment and its consequences for a Romantic anti-capitalism, see Patrick Eiden-Offe’s excellent *Die Poesie der Klasse*, esp. Chapter One, section one, “Romantischer Antikapitalismus: Ludwig Tiecks *Der junge Tischlermeister*.”

³ Wilhelm Heinrich Wackenroder, *Werke und Briefe*, 201.

Wackenroder's inaugural text for early-Romanticism's enthusiast religions of art, *Die Herzensergießungen eines kunstliebenden Klosterbruders* (1796),⁴ is an impassioned attempt to disentangle aesthetic from commercial value not by distinguishing the aesthetic judgment from the 'judgment, praise, and scorn' of the merchant but by suspending judgment altogether, in favor of the quasi-monastic, solitary contemplation of art. The Romantic sacralization of art that occurs, for instance, under the aegis of a 'new mythology' in Tieck's Jena friend Friedrich Schlegel's *Gespräch über die Poesie*, finds its loudest proponents in Tieck and Wackenroder, and functions explicitly as a response to art's newly gained-autonomy and simultaneous interpolation into an art market. As Tieck will ask again in collaboration with Wackenroder in their *Phantasien über die Kunst* (1799): "Können wir denn die Göttlichkeit der Kunst, das Höchste, was die menschliche Seele hervorbringen kann, nach der Elle des Kaufmanns messen, oder nach Goldgewichten abwägen?"⁵ If the answer of the early art enthusiast Tieck would have been an emphatic no, by the time Tieck drafts *Des Lebens Überfluss* in the 1830s the answer is more complicated.⁶ The protective space of the temple and the trope of art's divinity will – against the backdrop of Restoration politics since the Congress of Vienna in 1815, Hegel's declaration of the end of art in his lectures on aesthetics, Tieck's quarrel with members of the

⁴ Tieck and Wackenroder's collaborative text is drafted just while Jean Paul is finishing his preface to *Siebenkäs*.

⁵ *Phantasien über die Kunst für Freunde der Kunst* in Wackenroder, *Werke*, 290-291.

⁶ In a related vein, Heinrich Heine describes three "Manieren" of Tieck's oeuvre and his inconsistent "Werth" as a literary author: the first is the Tieck that writes only with the support of his patronizing publisher, "auf Antrieb und Bestellung eines Buchhändlers"; these works are, Heine concludes, "sehr unbedeutend, ja sogar ohne poesie," "geitzig" as if Tieck were saving all his "geistige Reichtümer" for later (Heine, *Die romantische Schule*, 180). Heine praises Tieck's second style, inspired by the early Romantic circle around the Schlegel brothers, which includes his early novellas such as *Der blonde Eckbert* and *Der Runenberg*; the third style is, however, the death knoll of Tieck's enthusiast Romanticism: "Der ehemalige Enthusiast, welcher einst, aus schwärmerischen Eifer, sich in den Schooß der katholischen Kirche begeben, [. . .] welcher die Kunst nur in der naiven Herzensergießung liebte: dieser trat jetzt auf als Gegner der Schwärmerey, als Darsteller des modernsten Bürgerlebens, als Künstler, der in der Kunst das klarste Selbstbewußtseyn verlangte, kurz als ein vernünftiger Mann" (182).

Junges Deutschland group⁷ – seem to have become superfluous, frivolous, luxurious.

In this context, Tieck's *Des Lebens Überfluss* responds to a growing concern with the economy of prose at the beginning of the nineteenth century. This chapter charts how a value form of literature emerged in a post-Goethe economy of prose to become a central concern for the 19th-century novella. It begins by outlining this concern as it paradigmatically expresses itself in Novalis' readings of Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister* at the beginning of this chapter. The economy of prose, or in Novalis' language the economic gospel, that Goethe's novel articulates entails prose's turn to those economic matters that shape a (bourgeois) prosaic consciousness, as Hegel will call it. The economy of prose describes, in this regard, a subset or specific inflection of a larger aesthetic topos in the first half of the nineteenth century, namely the relation between prose and poetry. The central literary project of transfiguring the prosaic world turns out in this context to be a project not only of aesthetic *Verklärung* but also of economic *Verwertung*, that is, the valorization of prose (literature).

As this chapter's reading of *Des Lebens Überfluss* aims to show, Tieck's novella stages a last-ditch attempt at a literary valorization of the world of prose and the prose of the world, turning this gesture into its main narrative event; the novella ultimately ends in a kind of *Wirtschaftswunder*: a wondrous economic event that determines the fate of a poetic, Romantic imagination in a prosaic economy. What Tieck had developed as a central poetics of Romantic literature – a poetics of the *Wunder* – in an essay on Shakspeare ("Über Shakspeare's Behandlung des Wunderbaren" [1793]) is brought to bear on the economy of prose in *Des Lebens Überfluss*. While the early poetics of the "Wunder" aimed, as Dorothea von Mücke

⁷ On Tieck's relationship to the Young Germany movement and on his position in the historical context of Restoration Germany, see the entries "Das Junge Deutschland" and "Tiecks Epochalität (Spätaufklärung, Frühromantik, Klassik, Spätromantik, Biedermeier/Vormärz, Frührealismus)" in *Ludwig Tieck: Leben, Werk, Wirkung*, 120-130; 131-147.

writes, at a “critique of a narrow and ultimately reductionist view of reality,”⁸ Tieck’s late novellas respond to the problem articulated by the characters of *Des Lebens Überfluss*: “Wir leben eigentlich [. . .] so wunderbar, wie es nur in der Tausend und einen Nacht geschildert werden kann. Aber wie soll das in der Zukunft werden; denn diese sogenannte Zukunft rückt doch irgend einmal in unsre Gegenwart hinein” (235). This future was for Tieck beginning to seem largely determined by a prosaic economy whose encroachment on the poetic could be registered right down to the individual word. Tieck captured this relation between the marvelous and poetic and the prosaic economic in an observation from the beginning of his final novella, *Waldeinsamkeit* (1841). In a scene centered around a nostalgic retrospective reflection on the literature of the “vorigen Jahrhunderts”⁹ and in particular Tieck’s own literature, the characters at the opening of the novella comment on how Tieck’s neologism “Waldeinsamkeit,” which became a central topos of Romantic marvel, is appropriated for a real-estate listing:

Sonderbar genug [. . .] daß ein vor Jahren unerhörter Ausdruck, der sein poetisches Gewand nicht ablegen kann, ebenso in das alltägliche Geschäftswesen übergegangen ist, wie die Ausdrücke ‚ins Leben treten – Leistungen – sich herausstellen – Begebnisse – etwas beleben, statt erleben’ – und dergleichen mehr, oder wie ‚Zunftzwang, Fabrikanstalt, Besserungshaus’ – die mehr oder minder notwendig, oder uns für das Alltägliche aufgedrungen sind.

As part of an apology for Tieck’s neologism, which in its first appearance in Tieck’s *Der blonde*

⁸ Dorothea von Mücke, *The Seduction of the Occult*, 5. Von Mücke defines Tieck’s Wunder as a text-immanent playing against each other of reality and illusion in the Romantic text that devises a mode of inviting acceptance of the fantastic as part of ordinary reality amongst an increasingly skeptical, Enlightenment audience. The marvelous provides in this way an “antidote to narrow, shallow, predictable, and impoverished constructions of reality” (6).

⁹ The scene’s set-up of a previous Romantic and future prosaic generation of literary authors seems in a way to echo Tieck’s response to a polemic against him by members of the liberal *Junges Deutschland* group when he writes, “so viele dieser neuen großen Entdeckungen und Wahrheiten [of the younger literary generation] schön längst in meinen Schriften, zum Teil den frühesten, stehen.” Tieck, *Der Junge Tischlermeister* in *Schriften*, 11:12.

Eckbert (1797) was rejected by contemporaries, the opening of *Waldeinsamkeit* insists that poetic concepts cannot lose their poetic quality when transferred to the sphere of the everyday (what the narrative calls “Gewöhnungen”), even and especially in the utilitarian context of real estate.¹⁰ *Des Lebens Überfluss* turns this problematic into a novella by posing the question of whether the Romantic and poetic becomes – against an encroaching prosaic future – simply superfluous.

Poetic Waste

As suggested in the introduction to this dissertation, the last decades of the eighteenth century are characterized by a double move: aesthetic value becomes intrinsic and extrinsic at once. The time around 1800 witnesses the ascent of originality or genius authorship as the supreme value of modern literature; the first formulations of an art religion of the Romantics that sought to turn art’s liberation from imitation into a springboard for a speculative metaphysics; and the rise of the commercialized book industry, the copyrighted author, and the mass reading public.¹¹ Precisely as German literature is turning to its own internal mechanisms and its author

¹⁰ On the basis of this commentary on the “Immobilienanzeige,” a development of the early nineteenth century, Thomas Wegmann argues for a “Literaturgeschichte einer affektiven Immobilie.” see Wegmann, “Über das Haus.” Tieck’s novella coincidentally names “Leistungen” as another example of these “Gewöhnungen.” “Leistung” in this prosaic economic sense is the subject of chapter 3 in this study.

¹¹ For an account of the complicated emergence of originality as a prime value of modern literature against the backdrop of a democratization of literature, the rise of a book market and middle-class literary public see Fleming, *Exemplarity and Mediocrity*. The Romantic coupling of non-imitation with a new mythology resonates in many Romantic corners around 1800 and is central to, for instance, Schlegel’s *Gespräch über die Poesie*. In another context, Schlegel equates imitation with bad ‘economy’: “Alle Nachahmer in der Poesie und Philosophie sind eigentlich verlaufene Ökonomen. Jeder Mensch hat seinen ökonomischen Instinkt, der gebildet werden muß, so gut wie auch die Orthographie und die Metrik gelernt zu werden verdienen. Aber es gibt ökonomische Schwärmer und Pantheisten, die nichts achten als die Notdurft und sich über nichts freuen als über ihre Nützlichkeit. Wo sie hinkommen, wird alles platt und handwerksmäßig, selbst die Religion, die Alten und die Poesie, die auf ihrer Drechselbank nichts edler ist als Flachshecheln.” Friedrich Schlegel, “*Athenäums-Fragmente*,” frag. 390 in *Fragmente der Frühromantik*, 72. On the rise of commercialized authorship in the context of copyright, see Heinrich Bosse, *Autorschaft ist Werkherrschaft* and Woodmansee, *Author, Art, and the Market*.

for its criteria of value,¹² it finds itself confronted with a literary market and cannot (or no longer) deny its economy and status as commodity. The pressure to articulate literary value in terms of market value (even if *ex negativo*) leads literature into the curious position of declaring itself superfluous or extravagant, in short: a luxury good.¹³ As suggested in the introductory reading of Jean Paul's preface to *Siebenkäs*, literature since the end of the eighteenth century will provide its own grounds for what constitutes its value and do so in explicit or implicit dialogue with the literary market.¹⁴ The story of literature's autonomy is simultaneously the story of its release into an industry of letters in which the high value of literature will come to be articulated in a negative relation to the economy of the book market: in terms of invaluableeness, non-utility, extravagance, or frivolity. On a structural level this liberation entails a hefty paradox for literature: it is forced to measure its value both in and outside the terms of the market. Rendered

¹² Luhmann emphasizes this point more generally for the art system on a whole and pinpoints this turn inward to the Italian Renaissance, in particular: "Erst seit dem späten Mittelalter kann man davon sprechen, daß Kunstwerke Kriterien zu genügen suchen, die in der Kunst selbst liegen [. . .] Aber wie konnte es kunstspezifische Kriterien geben, wenn man gar nicht gewohnt war, Kunst unabhängig von sinngebenden Kontexten zu beurteilen? Und wie könnte man die Beobachtung von Kunst als Kunst auf eigene Beine stellen, wenn es solche Kriterien noch gar nicht gab?" Luhmann, *Kunst der Gesellschaft*, 257. In the context of Italian Renaissance art, Luhmann identifies the emergence of artistic virtuosity as a guarantor of aesthetic value: "die Einschätzung der Kunstwerke verlagert sich vom Wert des verwendeten Materials (Gold, teure Blaus) plus Arbeitszeit wie beim Handwerk in das künstlerische Können. Das hatte eine Aufwertung des Ansehens der schönen Künste und einzelne Künstler zur Folge" (258).

¹³ For a detailed history of literature's relation to luxury see Matt Erlin, *Necessary Luxuries*. This chapter converges with many of Erlin's concerns, though Erlin connects these concerns to concrete historical developments in Germany's national economy and book market, with a focus on the book itself rather than, as in this study, the poetic, formal, or philosophical implications of this relation between economy and literature. "Books and reading [. . .] were also closely associated with aspects of the eighteenth-century concept of luxury that are more alien to our contemporary sensibilities and can thus help us to grasp the historical specificity of the category: the association of luxury not just with the expensive or the rare or the ornamental, but especially with the excessive and the superfluous, with overstimulated senses and a runaway imagination. These characteristics of the book as artifact, together with the unique capacity of literary texts to take up a position vis-à-vis their own commodity status, made the literary sphere a privileged site for grasping the emergence and working through the impact of what eighteenth-century observers perceived as modern luxury" (3).

¹⁴ Even a literary programs as far from commercial concerns as Schlegel's 'new mythology' is explicitly articulated as a challenge to a new reading culture and to the book market: "Durch die Myth.[ologie] wird die Lectüre und d[er] Buchhandel ein Ende nehmen. Das Lesen ist nah daran sich selbst zu vernichten." *Kritische Friedrich-Schlegel-Ausgabe*, 18:257.

a singular commodity with little use-value in daily life, literature nonetheless must possess an exchange-value that it simultaneously disavows in order to qualify as literature. Irreducible to yet dependent on an industry of letters, literature is inscribed in a law of value it exceeds. It thus structurally faces the risk of being not just a luxury good but, worse, a superfluous one. I recall here Jochen Hörisch's point, quoted in this dissertation's introduction, that literature's status as superfluous is both a consequence of its exceptional commodity status and a condition of possibility for its particular modes of imaginative practice and fictionality.

Schöne Literatur ist stets von dem Verdacht umgeben, funktional überflüssig zu sein [. . .] Das Überflüssige aber ist auch das, was im Überfluß lebt und sich deshalb leisten kann, was andere sich versagen müssen. Literatur begreift sich schon früh und verstärkt seit dem 16. Jahrhundert als das Medium, das die Probleme der Deckung nicht hat und diese Probleme gerade deshalb umso besser beobachten kann. Denn Dichtung stellt gar nicht erst den Anspruch, ihre Aussagen seien gedeckt. Dichtung ist eben Fiktion: sie muß nicht durch wirkliche Ereignisse oder durch Realien gedeckt sein.¹⁵

If literature in Hörisch's account gains autonomy through its self-declaration as superfluous, Werner Hamacher's reading of Goethe's alignment between literature ("Poesie) and extravagance ("Verschwendung") in the allegorical guise of the "Knabe Lenker," steering the cart of the god of riches, Pluto (with Faust behind the mask), is far more skeptical. As Hamacher will pose the question in his reading of Goethe's *Faust*: if value is, first and foremost, something that is represented, how can it have any substance at all? For Hamacher this question is simultaneously the question of language; and the insubstantiality of value simultaneously the insubstantiality of the contract between Faust and Mephistopheles, that is the insubstantiality of one's given word:

Aus der Prämisse der Insubstantialität von Welt und Sprache ergeben sich für Faust zwei zwingende und unaufhebbar widersprüchliche Konsequenzen: wo kein Wort Bestand hat, kann auch das Wort nichts gelten, das seine Unbeständigkeit verspricht . . . Zum andern muß aber da, wo kein Wort gilt, dasjenige Wort alles gelten, das die Unverlässlichkeit,

¹⁵ Jochen Hörisch, *Kopf oder Zahl*, 19-20.

Unbeständigkeit und Wertlosigkeit des gegebenen Worts behauptete.¹⁶

The economy of literature rests, by this logic, on a promise of meaning (and value) that in the moment of its articulation is already expended, used up, or squandered prior to any accumulation. As Joseph Vogl suggests in his Hamacher-inspired reading of the allegory of the Knabe Lenker, literature is like the “Knabe” in that both figure a “Verheißung, die Fülle verspricht und Mangel erzeugt.”¹⁷ In Hamacher’s reading, the expenditure or “Verausgabung” of meaning and wealth in Goethe’s play follows a logic of *Schein* or semblance that, beyond the phenomenal appearance of value, ultimately retains what cannot be fully expended in appearing. In other words, a certain ground of value remains, which Hamacher, following Kant and Goethe calls “Würde.” “Würde” as Kant describes it in the *Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten* (1785) is distinct from both market and emotional value, from a value that is linked to “die allgemeinen menschlichen Neigungen und Bedürfnisse” and therefore has a “Marktpreis,” and from a value that, “auch ohne ein Bedürfnis vorauszusetzen, einem gewissen Geschmacke, d.i. einem Wohlgefallen am bloßen zwecklosen Spiel unsere Gemütskräfte, gemäß ist” and for this reason has an “Affektionspreis.” Only “Würde” as an “innerer Wert” has neither price nor “relativen Wert.” It is the value that constitutes the “Bedingung [. . .] unter der allein etwas zweck an sich selbst sein kann.”¹⁸ When Goethe’s play announces that “Das Würdige beschreibt sich nicht” (5562), this becomes in Hamacher’s reading the possibility of rescuing a non-positive, insubstantial (condition of) literary value out of its structural tendency towards superfluosity.

¹⁶ Hamacher, “Faust, Geld,” 134.

¹⁷ Joseph Vogl, *Kalkül und Leidenschaft*, 326.

¹⁸ Kant, *Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten*, quoted in Hamacher, 156, note 26.

Hörisch has suggested that not *Faust* but Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister* is marked by the interrelated observation of an "Überfluß der Bücher" and a "Knappheit des Geldes" as "komplementarären Daten."¹⁹ As Hörisch describes it, quoting the novel: Wilhelm Meister "muß, Dramen schreibend, erfahren, daß 'das *goldne* Zeitalter der Autorschaft, . . . (in dem) die Presse noch nicht die Welt mit soviel unnützen Schriften überschwemmt hatte,' genau dann vorüber ist, wenn auch Schöngeistern (wie ihm) 'der Wert und die Würde des Goldes' unabweisbar werden" (Hörisch, 63). Indeed, if the Knabe of Goethe's *Faust* allegorically links poetry with waste, Wilhelm Meister is taught the very prosaic lesson that art pays. This is the case, for instance, when, in the scene Hörisch quotes here, Wilhelm reluctantly receives monetary remuneration for his work as a writer. While the Baron who acts as Wilhelm's patron here insists that Wilhelm see this "Gabe" not as a "Belohnung" of this talent but, quite simply, as an "Ersatz" for his time and "eine Erkenntlichkeit" for his "Mühe" – which because humans are not all "Geist" can be used as a "Mittel" in order to satisfy the "Bedürfnisse" of the body – Wilhelm sees the compensation, which turns his work of art into a means to an end, a medium of exchange, as an assault on the singularity of his artistic work and a hindrance to "das freie Spiel einer glücklichen Erinnerung."²⁰ In other words, what Wilhelm rejects when he first turns down the Baron's payment is both the latter's valuation of Wilhelm's art *qua* work in terms of labor-time – albeit in the Classical sense of Smith and Ricardo as time spent by a given human worker manufacturing a product and not in Marx's critical sense of socially necessary labor-time – and the latter's instrumental reduction of the work of art to the satisfaction of needs. Wilhelm thereby

¹⁹ Hörisch, *Kopf oder Zahl*, 63.

²⁰ Goethe, *Wilhelm Meister*, 203.

implicitly insists on the value of his work as *superfluous* to need at the same time that he accepts the payment as a compensation (and solution) for his otherwise poor economizing of time and money (“Ich habe sowohl mit dem Gelde als mit der Zeit [. . .] nicht zum besten hausgehalten” [204]).²¹ In recognizing the “Wert und Würde” of the money “als ob [. . .] zum ersten Mal,” Wilhelm navigates a third-way and can both have his autonomy aesthetics, with its imperative of singular, immaterial value (“Ehre” or “Würde”), and see his art reduced to way of making ends meet (through the “Wert” of money). Indeed, while the baron had insisted the payment was not an expression of the value of Wilhelm’s talent, Wilhelm can now see it as the “Erwerb, den er seinem Talent schuldig war” – that is, as both an economic and aesthetic valuation of his work, that both provides for him materially and intensifies his aesthetic sensibility. Wilhelm’s work of art is thus not the pure expenditure of poetry but the necessary surplus.

An Economic Gospel (Novalis on Goethe)

Even as it has become the locus classicus for discussions of art and economy, Goethe’s *Faust* is hardly the only text of the period to question the position of *Poesie* vis-à-vis a larger economy of literature (is it excessive, superfluous, extravagant, etc.).²² I have already suggested that Jean Paul’s preface to *Siebenkäs* drives an analogy between letters and numbers to its extreme, rendering poetic literature (as opposed to, for instance, the *Wiener Briefe* or promissory notes Jean Paul carries with him) that which puts the merchant to sleep in its extravagant digressiveness. But perhaps the most famous novel of the 1790s, Goethe’s *Wilhelm Meister* launches even more explicitly discussions about the *economy of prose* and the value of the

²¹ On Goethe’s own reserves about the *Honorar* see Bosse, *Autorschaft ist Werkherrschaft*, 79-80. Bosse suggests that only in the Goethezeit do literary authors become scrupulous about accepting an *Honorar*.

²² Marx’s many citations of Faust in his theory of money are probably the start to this. Of late, see for instance the conclusion to Richard T. Gray, *Money Matters*; see also Marc Shell’s “Language and Property: The Economics of Translation in Goethe’s Faust” in *Money, Language, Thought*; see chapter 5 of Vogl, *Kalkül und Leidenschaft*.

poetic. In his fragmentary notes on Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister*, Novalis offers a biting, if telling, critical assessment of Goethe's novel: "*Gegen Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre. Es ist im Grunde ein fatales, albernes Buch [. . .] undichterisch im höchsten Grade, was den Geist betrifft – so poetisch auch die Darstellung ist.*"²³ Having unequivocally praised Goethe's novel up until 1799 precisely for its poetic achievement as a masterwork of Romanticism,²⁴ in his notes from February 1800 Novalis is at once emphatic and ambivalent in condemning Goethe's text. Swaying between reproach for the novel's lack of poetic spirit and praise for its poetic form, Novalis succinctly formulates what he sees to be the central paradox of Goethe's novel in a letter to Ludwig Tieck: "[...] ich sehe so deutlich die große Kunst, mit der die Poësie durch sich selbst im Meister vernichtet wird."²⁵ The paradox of a work of art that artfully destroys what makes it great art – the novel's poetic self-destruction – is for Novalis part of the "Farce" that lurks behind Goethe's "poetisierte bürgerliche und häusliche Geschichte" (*Schriften* 3:639). In Goethe's novel, poetry becomes the 'harlequin' of its own comedy of errors as the prosaic bourgeois relations of the novel take the upper hand. The art of Goethe's novel thus lies neither in poetic potentiation (one of Novalis' definitions of Romanticism) nor in fulfilling Schlegel's famous definition of progressive universal-poetry but rather in poetry's reflexive confrontation with its own impossibility in an age of prose, a confrontation that itself runs the risk of destroying the Romantic: "Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre sind gewissermaßen durchaus *prosaisch* [. . .] Das Romantische geht darinn zu Grunde" (638). While Novalis' remarks are hardly

²³ Novalis, *Schriften*, 3:646.

²⁴ See for instance frag. 87 in *Das allgemeine Brouillon*: "Romantik. Absolutisirung – Universalisirung – Classification des individuellen Moments, der ind[ividuellen] Situation etc. ist das eigentliche Wesen des *Romantisirens*. vid. *Meister. Märchen*." Novalis, *Schriften*, 3:256.

²⁵ Novalis to Ludwig Tieck, Jena, February 23, 1800, in *Schriften* 4:321-323. In this letter Novalis not only repeats verbatim his critique of the novel in his published fragments, he also announce his desire to write a review of Wilhelm Meister: "Wenn die Litt[eratur] Zeit[ung] nicht so jämmerlich wäre, so hätt ich Lust gehabt eine Recension von Wilh[elm] Meist[ers] L[ehr]jahren] einzuschicken."

unequivocal and shift erratically in tone²⁶ – as they unfold the tension between the prosaic and the poetic that will become a definitive topos in the discourse on the end of (poetic) art around 1800,²⁷ they are consistent in one crucial regard: in linking the fate of poetry in *Wilhelm Meister* to the *economy* of prose in Goethe's novel. "Sehr viel Oeconomie – mit prosaischen, wohlfeilen Stoff ein poetischer Effect erreicht" (639). The economy of prose, it would seem, lies here in a kind of literary optimality: the achievement of maximum (poetic) effect with a minimum of poetic content;²⁸ or, as Novalis expresses it, drawing an analogy between Wilhelm and alchemists of gold, in the surplus generated out of the contingency of prosaic relations: "Sie suchen viel – und finden zufällig indirect *mehr*." But if the economy of prose in Goethe's novel would seem to describe one particular possibility of poetic presentation, the pure ascent of the economic in the novel likewise spells out the self-destruction of poetry as Novalis describes in his letter to Tieck: "während sie [die Poesie] im Hintergrund scheitert, die Oeconomie sicher auf

²⁶ Novalis' inconsistent comments on *Wilhelm Meister* are exacerbated by the complicated editorial history of Novalis' writings. As the editor and commentator of the collection *Goethe im Urteil seiner Kritiker*, Karl Robert Mandelkow notes, Novalis' negative remarks may be heavily redacted, if not forged, by Ludwig Tieck and Friedrich Schlegel, the editors of Novalis' *Schriften*. "Durch Umstellung der originalen Reihenfolge und Weglassung wichtiger Textteile wurde die gegen Goethe gerichtete negative Tendenz der Fragmente verstärkt. In dieser Form haben die vielbeachteten Goethe-Fragmente des Novalis die Wirkungsgeschichte des *Wilhelm Meisters* nicht nur, sondern Goethes überhaupt wesentlich mitbestimmt." Karl Robert Mandelkow (ed.), *Goethe im Urteil seiner Kritiker*, 544. Despite these editorial problems, Novalis' review sets the tone for much of the reception of Goethe's novel in the 19th century. See also Hans-Joachim Mähl, "Novalis' Wilhelm-Meister-Studien des Jahres 1797."

²⁷ Paul Fleming points out that Novalis' comments on *Wilhelm Meister* anticipate Hegel's lexicon of the end of art and contextualizes Novalis' reading of Goethe's novel as part of the aesthetic complex of *Wilhelm Meister*: how can art engage the average, mediocre, or ordinary and still remain art? See Fleming's discussion of "The Art of Renunciation" in *Exemplarity and Mediocrity*, esp. 106-113.

²⁸ This optimality is noticed by other Goethe readers as well, for instance Schiller, who writes positively to Goethe of how "mit Wenigem [. . .] schon soviel ausgerichtet [ist]" in the novel. Schiller to Goethe, Hamburger Ausgabe. This sense of economy in terms of optimality is, at least implicitly, indebted to the metaphysics of Leibniz's theodicy in which God "[realisiert] das Maximum der Existenz und das Optimum an Essenz des Seienden in einem gegebenen Raum durch Ökonomie und Sparsamkeit, indem er demjenigen folgt, was kompossibel ist." Pierre Koslowski, "Maximierung von Existenz," 58. Koslowski's article points to overlaps in Leibniz' sense of economy and the discipline of political economy. On Leibniz' economy of optimalization and maximization and its implications for early theories of the novel see chapter three "System der Begebenheit" of Vogl, *Kalkül und Leidenschaft*, esp. 154-159.

festen Grund und Boden mit ihren Freunden sich gütlich thut, und Achselzuckend nach dem Meere sieht” (*Schriften* 4:323).

Novalis’ usage of economy with regards to Goethe’s prose is two-pronged.²⁹ On the one hand, it describes the economic subject matter, the *Stoff* of Goethe’s Bildungsroman, most notably Wilhelm’s struggle to negotiate between aesthetic (“Sinn für schöne Kunst”) and commercial (“Geschäftsleben”) aspirations;³⁰ or the bourgeois economic teleology Novalis identifies in the novel: “Wilhelm soll oeconomisch werden durch die *oeconomische* Familie, in die er kommt” (*Schriften* 3:639). In fact, anticipating one of the central terms of Lukács *Theorie des Romans*, Novalis names the tension between the fine arts and commerce in *Meister*, between “Schönheit und Nutzen,”³¹ a problem of “*Dissonanz*” (2:518, italics in original) that the “wahrhaft poetisch[er], prosaisch[er]” novel turns into a “Konsonant.” As subject matter, then, the economy of prose Novalis identifies in Goethe points moreover to a larger theory of the *Roman* and of Romantic art.³² On the other hand, economy describes the novel’s formal

²⁹ Cf. Vogl: “Hardenberg spricht [. . .] von der Ökonomie in einem doppelten Sinn: von einer, die sich zuletzt durch Zweck/Mittel-Verhältnisse, egoistische Absichten, Resultatslogik und einen willkürlichen Plan definiert [. . .] und von einer anderen Ökonomie, in der Zwecke und Mittel, Ursachen und Wirkungen ineinander übergehen, in der es keine ökonomische Teleologie, sondern nur eine Teleologie des Ökonomischen gibt.” *Kalkül und Leidenschaft*, 268.

³⁰ Novalis, *Fragmente und Studien*, quoted in *Goethe im Urteil seiner Kritiker*, 171.

³¹ Novalis, *Schriften*, 2:581. This is, after all, one of, if not the, central problem of literary and aesthetic value in the 1790s, as mentioned in the introduction to this dissertation. It haunts aestheticians, like Hutcheson, Hume, Kant, and Moritz, and literary authors alike. In a somewhat different vein, Franco Moretti has analyzed this tension with regards to the style of prose in bourgeois literature and links usefulness as a ‘keyword’ to an underlying principle of “Zweckrationalität” in modern prose. See Moretti, *The Bourgeois*, esp. 35-44.

³² This point would require further elaboration that this chapter has no space for. In his theory of the novel, Lukács sees life’s dissonance – which is, in fact, the counter term to totality – as the central problem of form, which it is the latter’s task to resolve: “Jede Kunstform ist durch die metaphysische Lebensdissonanz definiert, die sie als Grundlage einer in sich vollendeten Totalität bejaht und gestaltet.” The modern novel, in particular, faces dissonance as a problem of what Lukács calls “das Nicht-Eingehen-Wollen der Sinnesimmanenz in das empirische Leben.” Lukács, *Theorie des Romans*, 69. Of course, following the early Romantics, Lukács’ solution to the problem of dissonance in the novel is irony as the “Selbstkorrektur der Brüchigkeit” (74). In a different context, Lukács suggests that the consonance

organization, its narrative economy, the *táxis* or order of its prose with its ‘melodic’ distribution of elements.³³ The economy of Goethe’s prose in both these senses is the fulcrum of Novalis’ reflections on the poetry of *Wilhelm Meister*: with the economy of its prose, the poetry of the novel rises and falls. In his earlier comments on the novel in *Das allgemeine Brouillon*, Novalis links the poetic rhythm with which the novel’s ‘ordinary’ material is presented to the “oeconomischen Vertheilung” of its adjectives.³⁴ And the novel’s turn to the everyday, to the prosaic life of the ordinary and normal, is aesthetically redeemed through the absolute economy of this average world: the order of the domestic household (“die Nettigkeit und Ordnung ihres Hauswesens” – up until the nineteenth century economy retains its sense as the order of the house/*oikos*) in *Meister*; the orchestrated actions of Goethe’s moderately talented characters; the well-economized, “zweckmäßige” use and distribution of time all constitute the novel’s most

that Novalis is after marks the splitting point between Romanticism and Goethe, see “Zur romantischen Lebensphilosophie: Novalis” in *Die Seele und die Formen*, 73-88. On the role of dissonance and irony in Lukács’ *Theorie des Romans* see Eva Geulen, “Response and Commentary” in *Romanticism and Biopolitics*, ed. Alastair Hunt and Matthias Rudolf. December 2012. Romantic Circles. 18 October 2017. <https://www.rc.umd.edu/praxis/biopolitics/HTML/praxis.2012.geulen.html>; Rüdiger Campe, “Form and Life in the Theory of the Novel” in *Constellations* 18, no. 1 (2011): 62-63.

³³ For Vogl, the dual valence of economy in Novalis’ notes on Goethe’s novel marks an epistemic difference between a late-enlightenment paradigm of economic order in terms of teleological/means-ends relations, i.e. a logic of result and plan, and a radically modern, Romantic economic paradigm of infinite process, anti-teleology, and autoregulative systematicity. Novalis’ writings signal for Vogl a turn to a paradigm of an autopoietic system that derives its ‘beauty’ from the degree to which it mobilizes a semiotic system of self-promulgating signs and media, that is, to quote Novalis: a “Proceß, wo das Mittel die Hauptsache und das Resultat die Nebensache wird: schöner Proceß” (quoted in Vogl, 268-270). See Vogl, *Kalkül und Leidenschaft*, 255-88.

³⁴ Novalis, “Üb[er] W[ilhelm] M[eister]”, frag. 445 in *Schriften*, 3:326. By 1800 economy has already become a term that describes the order of a number of systems (linguistic/literary, monetary, psychic, etc.). The Grimm dictionary suggests that *Ökonomie* makes its way from the Greek-Latinized *oeconomia* as a designation for the order of the household (“Haushaltungskunst,” etc.) into German in the 16th century, coming to be used in a general and figurative way to describe “die anordnung und zweckmäßige einrichtung eines ganzen.” On the improper/figurative use of economy in rhetoric, see Burkhart Cardauns, “Zum Begriff der ‘oeconomia’ in der lateinischen Rhetorik und Dichtungskritik,” in Theo Stemmler (ed.), *Ökonomie: sprachliche und literarische Aspekte eines 2000 Jahre alten Begriffs*, 9-18. On semantic shifts in the term as evidence by a history of German dictionary entries, see Gisele Harras, *Deutsches Wörterbuch von Jacob und Wilhelm Grimm* (Leipzig, 1854-1961), s.v. “Oekonomie.” See also the entry “Economy” in Barbara Cassin and Steven Rendall (ed.), *Dictionary of Untranslatables*.

memorable and aesthetically pleasurable moments. In his later, more condemning comments “Das Romantische” of Goethe’s novel perishes and the evisceration of *Naturpoesie* leaves behind nothing but economic nature: “Die ökonomische Natur ist die wahre – übrig bleibende.”

As Novalis reads it, the “autocapitulation” of poetic art in the face of the economy of prose cannot be fully prevented in *Wilhelm Meister*, neither by Goethe, who for Novalis is a “ganz praktischer Dichter” that treats his literary works like the Brit his “Waren” (*Schriften*, 3:640), nor by Meister himself who can merely slow down (“retardieren”) but ultimately cannot prevent “das Eindringen des Evangeliums der Ökonomie.”³⁵ For all of its efforts to poeticize “gewöhnlichen menschlichen Dingen” (*Schriften* 3:638), Goethe’s novel can at best embrace the this economic gospel, the economy of its prose, which in the wake of poetry’s self-destruction establishes itself, as Novalis writes to Tieck, “auf festen Grund und Boden.” The economy of prose in Goethe’s novel thus paradoxically marks both the limit of Romantic art in the novel and the condition of possibility for poetic presentation; a limit insofar as economy marks an instrumental logic of means-ends, a possibility insofar as economy points to the generation of a surplus, the contingent, indirect ‘more’ of *Wilhelm Meister*’s alchemy. Novalis’ linking of the struggle between prose and poetry, as Friedrich Schlegel will describe it,³⁶ to the formal and

³⁵ Novalis, *Schriften*, 3:647. Autocapitulation is Fleming’s term for Novalis’ account of what happens to art in “Goethe’s poetic affirmation of prosaic reality.” Fleming, *Exemplarity and Mediocrity*, Novalis’ rather acerbic analogy between British commodities and Goethe’s prose works belongs to the same uneasiness expressed in Jean Paul’s preface to *Siebenkäs* about the status of literature as a ‘good’ to be peddled.

³⁶ “Der Roman überhaupt kann als die Poesie der Prosa, als ein *Kampf* gegen das ihr entgegenstehnde prosaische Element angesehen werden—als ein Bestreben, alles Prosaische zu überwinden, zu besiegen und poetisch zu gestalten.” Or, in a commentary on Tieck’s novel *William Lovell* that is similar in tone to Novalis’ critique of *Wilhelm Meister*: “Das ganze Buch ist ein Kampf der Prosa und der Poesie, wo die Prosa mit Füßen getreten wird und die Poesie über sich selbst den Hals bricht.” Elsewhere Schlegel writes of Tieck’s novel: “Geist des Buchs unbedingte Verachtung der Prosa und Selbstvernichtung der Poesie.” Schlegel, quoted in Hamacher, “Friedrich Schlegel’s poetologische Umsetzung von Fichtes unbedingtem Grundsatz” in *Modern Language Notes* 95 (1980): 1175; 1178. As Hamacher points out, prose poses a danger to the novel insofar as it marks the beginning of the “Niedergang der Poesie in die Sphäre bloßer

thematic economy of Goethe's prose means that at stake in the economy of prose is precisely the possibility of Romantic art: can a prose literature that embraces something as prosaic as the economy still become Romantic *Poesie* without elevating the economic, as a logic of means/ends and sphere of utility, to a final purpose? Or, put differently, the possibility of Romantic art as this struggle between the prosaic and the poetic is, for Novalis, an economic question. This is the case insofar as the economic describes a principle of optimized narrative order in the work of prose: from the concatenation of events or *Vorfälle*, the constellation of characters, to the 'economic distribution' of verbs, the steady pace of narration ("Der Text ist nie übereilt," "Die *Verweilung* ist überall dieselbe," "der poetische Takt"), and the 'melodic' and 'marvelous' 'Romantic order' of Goethe's novel, which shows little concern for "Rang und Werth, Erstheit und Letzttheit – Große und Kleinheit" (Novalis, *Schriften* 2:326). In other words, the narrative economy is, in short, the balance of intensivity (the condensed focus on the single event or character, the diction of the novel) and extensivity (the infinite spectrum of possible events and characters, etc.) that allows prose – otherwise lacking poetry's meter, strict form, etc. – to become poetry. But even more crucially: what becomes clear in Novalis' comments is that narrative *economy* is important insofar as the economic provides, to borrow Carl Schmitt's description of this line, the prosaic *occasion*, as it were, for an infinite (poetic) Romanticism.³⁷

Novalis' main definition of Romanticism as a "qualit[ative] Potenzirung" must be read then in conjunction with his comments on the economy of prose in Goethe as a logic of

Mitteilung zu praktischen Zwecken" (1176). In other words, what Novalis will name economy is part of the larger complex of prose's instrumentalized communicational function, the flipside of which, for Novalis as well as for Schlegel, is the "Bedingung ihres [Prosas] Aufstiegs zur Darstellung des Absoluten."

³⁷ See Carl Schmitt's reading of Novalis' definition of Romanticism as a process by which "jeder Vorfall" might become the "erstes Glied einer unendlichen Reihe – Anfang eines unendlichen Romans." Schmitt, *Politische Romantik* (Munich: Duncker & Humboldt, 1919), 70.

valorization, indeed as the logic of a self-reflexive process of generating value. What Marx will later call surplus value or *Mehrwert* in his discussion of the “Wertbildungsprozess” in the economic sphere of production is prefigured here in Novalis in poetic terms. While Joseph Vogl has drawn attention to the striking similarities in Novalis’ comments on economy, money, and signs and Marx’s analysis of the process of circulation in his *Grundrisse*, likening Novalis’ description of a “schöner Prozess” as the inversion of the means-ends relationship (Novalis: “wo das Mittel die Hauptsache und das Resultat die Nebensache wird”) to Marx’s rather – in this regard – Romantic emphasis on how any point in the process of monetary circulation can function as both, in Marx’s words, “Anfangs- und Endpunkt,”³⁸ the overlap between these two thinkers of economy lies perhaps more properly in their similar description of the valorization process. What Marx calls the “okkulte Qualität” of value to self-valorize, “sich als Mehrwert von sich selbst als ursprünglichem Wert abstößt, sich selbst verwertet” and names “prozessierender Wert” or “automatisches Subjekt” in a “maßlos[e] Bewegung,” is in fact what Novalis has in mind when he defines romanticization in self-reflexive terms as “nichts als eine qualitative Potenzierung” that gives “dem Endlichen einen unendlichen Schein” (Novalis, *Schriften* 2, 545).

The ultimate economic art of Goethe’s novel would be to turn the prosaic bourgeois world poetic: “Schöne, liberale Oeconomie: Bildung einer poetischen Welt um sich her. Dichten mit lebendigen Figuren.”³⁹ Thus, it is less because *Wilhelm Meister* preaches an economic gospel

³⁸ Novalis and Marx quoted in Vogl, *Kalkül und Leidenschaft*, 269.

³⁹ Novalis, *Das Allgemeine Brouillon: Materialien zur Enzyklopädistik 1798/99* in *Schriften* 3:469. In a letter to Caroline Schlegel, Novalis uses this same formulation: “Die Poësie mit lebendigen Kräften, mit Menschen, und sonst gefällt mir immer mehr. Man muß eine poëtische Welt um sich her bilden und in der Poësie leben. Hieher gehört mein mercantilischer Plan. Diesem ordne ich die Schriftstellery unter. Ich lobe W[ilhelm] wegen seines lebhaften Treibens der Professorey. Auch dies gehört zur *schönen*, liberalen Oeconomie, dem eigentlichen Element der gebildeten Menschen.” Novalis to Caroline Schlegel in Jena, Freyberg 20 Jan 1799 274-276. *Schriften* 4:275. In his study of economy in early Romanticism, which makes Novalis’ phrase its title, Reinhard Saller suggests that Novalis’ note here marks a shift from an older application of the word economy to aesthetics in terms of a rationalist demand for

that poetry destroys itself in Goethe's novel than because Goethe fails to make this gospel poetic enough, that is, fails to poetically capitalize upon the world of prose in his novel. Novalis does not outright reject the economy of prose in a simple dichotomy of "Dichtung und Wirtschaft" (Vogl,) but aims to develop an economic gospel of his own that would poetically trump Goethe's.⁴⁰ This gospel would be his own Bildungsroman *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*, which, as he writes in his letter to Tieck aims to be an "Apotheose der Poesie."⁴¹

By outlining the economic dilemma of Goethe's prose novel, Novalis stumbles upon a central literary problem around and especially after 1800: what value, poetic or otherwise, does prose add to the world? *Pace* Vogl, for instance, who reads Novalis' *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* as a "poetische wie ökonomische Programmschrift" and Novalis' work more largely as signaling an epistemic shift in economic orders of knowledge around 1800 away from older paradigms of circulation and equilibrium towards "operationalisierten Selbstreferenz," I suggest that Novalis comments on Goethe's Bildungsroman address a particularly *literary* question that cannot be neatly subsumed under a discursive affinity between economic knowledge and literary text. Beyond such convergences between political economy and narrative literature in questions of (auto)regulation, governance, or "Steuerung," (i.e. of literary protagonists and economic actors

"Zweckmäßigkeit" and order to the demand for a "unkontrolliert ('lebendig') verlaufende Ordnung der Welt, die sich nach Kategorien der Ästhetik vollzieht und in deren Zentrum Poesie steht." Saller thus reads the economic in Novalis as the driving force between a Romantic synthesis of art and life. Reinhard Saller, *Schöne Ökonomie*, 50. It is worth noting overlaps between Novalis' and Schlegel's review of *Wilhelm Meister*. Much of what Schlegel comments on in Goethe's novel (the "retardierende Natur," the irony that allows persons and events to become ends in themselves, the 'accents', the way in which minor events take on great meaning, etc.) Novalis translates into an economic idiom. See Friedrich Schlegel, "Über Wilhelm Meister" in *Kritische Friedrich-Schlegel-Ausgabe*, vol. 2, ed. Ernst Behler (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1967) 126-147.

⁴⁰ See Vogl, *Kalkül und Leidenschaft*, 268.

⁴¹ Novalis, *Schriften* 4, 322.

alike);⁴² beyond converging semiologies of language and money around 1800, Novalis' comments on the intrusion of an 'economic gospel' in Goethe's prose address a concern about literary value irreducible to discursive entanglements between literature and economics as they sketch out the rules, techniques, or laws of an order of knowledge about regulation and order. Notwithstanding Novalis' encyclopedic ambitions to form a second-order "Wissen des Wissens," his reading of an economic gospel in *Wilhelm Meister* concerns less knowledge *tout court* than the very aesthetic question of how poetic literature can valorize the prosaic relations of everyday life, a question that will resonate throughout the nineteenth century.⁴³ In this regard the economy of prose, while it belongs to a larger encyclopedic network of economic knowledge in Novalis' oeuvre, addresses a different dimension of the economic than, say, his writings on political economy as a "Lebensordnungslehre." For Novalis what ultimately makes Goethe's novel a fatal book and a self-destruction of poetry is not its prosaic encounter with the economy but the fact that this encounter fails to become something more, that is, fails to generate the surplus-value of

⁴² This is one of the main points of contact between political economy as an order of knowledge and the novel as a literary genre concerned with contingency in Vogl's account. See especially Vogl's analogy between the *Turmgesellschaft* in Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister* and Adam Smith's famous trope of the invisible hand. *Kalkül und Leidenschaft*, 35-38. In his discussion of Novalis' economy, Vogl comes to the conclusion that "Das Romantische [. . .] ebenso wie eine 'schöne liberale Ökonomie'" in Novalis becomes a "Kriterium und Test für die autoregulative Kraft von Funktionssystemen überhaupt: das gilt für ein Wissen von der Regierung ebenso wie für die Ordnung des Romans." Vogl, *Kalkül und Leidenschaft*, 270. See also Vogl's chapter "Ökonomie und Regierung" in his recent *Der Souveränitätseffekt* for a more general account of economy as a question of order and governance. This account is, of course, heavily influenced by Agamben's recent reading of economy as the question of theological governance in *The Kingdom and the Glory*.

⁴³ Richard Gray has argued that an anti-physiocratic rhetoric of economics emerges in German thought towards the end of the 18th century to displace a concept of value that locates the source of value in nature with a concept of value in terms of human labor (Marx, of course, marks the tail end of this shift for Gray). Gray argues that this discursive shift coheres with a transformation in aesthetic thought from a notion of artistic creativity premised on imitation to one premised on imagination. Imagination, like human labor, can become the source of surplus value and human productivity. Thus, for instance, in Kant's aesthetics of artistic genius as in the anti-physiocratic writings of Goethe's brother-in-law Johann Georg Schlosser, "imagination is conceived as a fundamentally creative, indeed *value*-creative force." Richard T. Gray, *Money Matters*, (157).

poetry necessary to turn the prosaic world into art.

Behind the backs of the Bourgeoisie: The Wirtschaftswunder of the Novella

In the early 19th century, what is hitherto an almost unheard-of genre in German letters enters the German literary scene and becomes a dominant genre of the century at the moment that the economy of prose becomes a problem: the novella.⁴⁴ The novella becomes a privileged site for an investigation into the economy of prose precisely because of its extreme economy both structurally and formally: the novella essentially launches widespread popular literature, bolstering the literary market in the early nineteenth century. Moreover, the novella is characterized by an extreme economy of narration and by an almost obsession with economic matters. The 19th-century German novella displays a surprising interest in economic matters: the reflections on the substantiality of money in Chamisso's *Peter Schlemihl*; in addition to the problem of ignorance, Tieck's *Der blonde Eckbert* (1797) is also concerned with material wealth (Bertha's story); even Stifter's *Kalkstein* (1853) is about a priest's poverty and ends with an economic problem, Goethe's *Unterhaltungen deutscher Ausgewanderten* (1795), as the inaugural novella of modern German literature, reflects on movable and immovable property, proprietary and improprietary wealth, and all sorts of material and cultural "Güter;" Eichendorff's *Aus dem Leben eines Tagenichts* (1826) is about "Broterwerb;" Grillparzer's *Der arme Spielmann* (1847)

⁴⁴ See also Andrew Piper, *Dreaming in Books*: "The genre of the novella collection experienced a tremendous rise in popularity in the first half of the nineteenth century across Europe and the Atlantic, a fact that offers an important counterweight to the importance that scholars have accorded the novel in thinking about literary form around 1800. Where the novel functioned as a key genre at the turn of the nineteenth century to explore the possibility of networking—of bibliographic everywhere—it was the novella collection that emerged to address the problem of literary repetition and the bibliographic copy" (65). As Piper argues, despite its name the novella is a genre less concerned with literary novelty than with secondarity and reproduction. Highlighting specific literary and publishing practices in the nineteenth century, with a focus on E.T.A. Hoffmann, Piper shows how the novella was less about *Innerlichkeit* and more about *Äußerung*.

about a poor musician.⁴⁵

Moreover, the novella relies on its extreme narrative economy – its precision, construction, and concatenation – for its surplus of meaning; the stricter its economy the greater its surplus value. Less focused on processes of forming subjective identity like the Bildungsroman and less tied to the latter's teleological structure,⁴⁶ the novella often becomes a site for negotiations about what is worth writing down at all and how (i.e. in what order). In other words, in the 19th century the novella is the privileged genre for prose literature's reflections of its own value.

As what Lukács calls “die am reinsten artistische Form,” the novella is hardly a stable genre.⁴⁷ For Lukács, the artistry of the novella is measured in its ability to negotiate between form and chance,⁴⁸ the careful, tacit work of the lyrical subject who conceals herself behind “die harten Linien der vereinzelt herausgemeißelten Begebenheit” and through a principle of selection (which guarantees epic unity) balances the “schreiende Willkür des beglückenden und vernichtenden, aber immer grundlos darniederfahrenen Zufalls” with “sein klares, kommentarloses, rein gegenständliches Erfassen” (38). The problem of the genre for Lukács,

⁴⁵ For an American context, see Marc Shell's excellent and inimitable study of Edgar Allen Poe in “The Gold Bug: Introduction to ‘The Industry of Letters’ in America” which reads Poe's novella *The Gold Bug* (1843) as a text that provides an aesthetic reflection upon monetary symbolization against debates about paper money in mid-19th-century America. Shell, *Money, Language, Thought*, 5-23. Shell's text is groundbreaking for the field of literature and economics in part for how it establishes relations between economic and linguistic symbolization. As Shell points out in his chapter on Poe, literature is haunted, like money, by a fear that it might be nothing at all (a cipher) or have no value, and as Shell points out, literature, like money, is animated by credit or belief, which “involves the very ground of aesthetic experience.” Both money and literature are therefore backed by the same medium: writing. Shell, 7.

⁴⁶ See the differences that Gailus highlights as well: the psychic blind spot, the Romantic deconstruction of the Bildungsroman's fantasy of self-transparency. Gailus links the novella to the case study: both “limit the scope of representation to events marked explicitly as deviations” and contextualizes the genre within 19th-century historicism/notions of progress: the novella offers upsets “teleological schemata of meaning” at stake in historicist notions of progress and the Bildungsroman (750).

⁴⁷ Georg Lukács, *Theorie des Romans*, 38.

⁴⁸ This is the title of Andreas Gailus' essay, “Form and Chance.”

similar to that of the novel, is a formal one: it pivots on the issue of combatting contingency with literary form and for this reason requires a precise economy of form. But the novella, unlike the novel, has no chance at totality: the subjectivity of its selective forming, which approaches that of lyric poetry, can give a kind of unity or balance but is “ohne Totalität.” Instead, the novella confronts the problem of “Sinnlosigkeit” by turning it into form and this requires the economy of balance between contingency or chance and form.

Since Goethe’s famous definition of the novella as “eine sich ereignete unerhörte Begebenheit,”⁴⁹ the genre’s most salient feature in German-language literary history has been the integration of novelty, of the unheard-of event, in the narrative fabric of a story. As such, the genre has cognitive and discursive significance: as David Wellbery notes, the novella is directed toward the “case (*casus*) without precedent which is therefore not yet subsumed by law or canonical narrative.”⁵⁰ Its orientation toward the new means that the novella involves the narrative integration and contextualization of some not-yet known, disciplined, ordered or domesticated event, the working of raw material into a contextual order that the novella first provides.⁵¹ Yet, this integration, as well as the artistic balancing act that Lukács attributes to the novella, does not always occur as a smooth process. Indeed, traces of the event’s newness, or its traumatic “schreiende Willkür,” persist in the texture of the novella’s narrative poetics. In this way, the novella opens a site for negotiating contingency and order, exception and norm, history and event, as well as for reflection on the boundaries of a given system. As Andreas Gailus argues, the German-language novella of the long nineteenth century is “a *genre of crisis*,” one that “dramatizes states of exception, moments in which the world- and identity-constitutive

⁴⁹ Goethe in Eckermann, *Gespräche mit Goethe in den letzten Jahren seines Lebens*, 280.

⁵⁰ David Wellbery, afterword to *Goethe’s Collected Works*, 11:294.

⁵¹ See Fritz Breithaupt’s model of the novella’s excusability in *Kultur der Ausrede*.

function inherent in traditional patterns of ordering and interpreting has become unstable.”⁵² For Gailus novellas “thematize the limits of (social, psychic and narrative) systems” (740). The novella, as a genre of crisis, highlights instabilities, eccentricities, and risks for social, psychic, and narrative systems.

At the turn from the eighteenth to the nineteenth century, August Wilhelm Schlegel comments on the historico-philosophical status of the novella in his 1801-1802 Berlin lectures on literature and art. Drawing on the *querelle des Anciens et des Modernes*, Schlegel distinguishes between the ancient’s mode of writing history, which relies on techniques borrowed from the realm of poetry, i.e. the epic, and modern poetry, which inherits the task of writing history. If the historian Herodotus had to borrow from Homeric poetics to write history, Shakespeare the poet has become historian. In the context of history’s drifting into the realm of poetry, the novella becomes for A.W. Schlegel the historical genre amongst modern poetry which faces the task of narrating what “in der eigentlichen Historie keinen Platz findet, und dennoch allgemein interessant ist.”⁵³ The distinction then between ‘actual’ history and the novella pertains to their object of depiction: while the object of history is “das fortschreitende Wirken des Menschengeschlechts,” that of the novella is “was immerfort geschieht, der tägliche Weltlauf” insofar as this deserves being chronicled [*aufgezeichnet*]. At the risk of rendering the distinction overly schematic one might say that while history is concerned with mankind’s progress, with a development over time, the novella concerns itself with the continual or regular rhythm of the world. While Schlegel’s distinction seems to cleanly consign diachronic time to ‘actual’ historiography and synchronic time to the novella, the latter genre does not simply inherit the task of documenting the regular, but, as Schlegel elaborates, must be characterized by both

⁵² Andreas Gailus, “Form and Chance: The German Novella,” 740.

⁵³ August Wilhelm Schlegel, *Vorlesungen über schöne Literatur und Kunst*, 242.

extraordinary or unusual singularity and general validity: “um ächt zu seyn [. . .] [muß die Novelle] von der einen Seite durch seltsame Einzigkeit auffallen, von der andern Seite eine gewisse allgemeine Gültigkeit haben” (242). With this, the novella becomes a deeply ambiguous genre, one charged with the literary representation of particularity and generality, of chronicling the continual, regular occurrences in the course of the world *and* those moments that punctuate this course, what occurs both *immerfort* and *einmal*.

This ambiguity is not solved by Schlegel but persists throughout his discussion of the novella:

Um eine Novelle gut zu erzählen, muß man das alltägliche, was in die Geschichte mit eintritt, so kurz als möglich abfertigen, und nicht unternehmen es auf ungehörige Art aufstützen zu wollen, nur bey dem Außerordentlichen und Einzigem verweilen, aber auch dieses nicht motivirend zergliedern, sondern es eben positiv hinstellen, und Glauben dafür fordern. Das Unwahrscheinlichste darf dabey nicht vermieden werden, vielmehr ist es oft gerade das Wahrste, und also ganz an seiner Stelle. An die materielle Wahrscheinlichkeit d.h. die Bedingungen der Wirklichkeit eines Vorfalls, muß sich der Erzähler durchaus binden, hier erfordert sein Zweck die größte Genauigkeit (247).

While the novella would appear upon first glance decidedly unromantic, oriented, as it were, towards the quotidian, the criterion Schlegel introduces by demanding “Glauben” qualifies this everydayness. Thus while Schlegel makes clear a few sentences later that regardless of the tone the novella strikes (whether tragic, catastrophic or even burlesque), it must always be at home “in der wirklichen Welt” and from this position should depict the *Weltlauf* “wie er ist,” the novella’s orientation towards the everyday must ultimately be kept to a minimum; the novella may be quotidian, but it should not celebrate this. Rather, the novella dwells on the extraordinary and singular, not with analytical intent that would attribute a motivational causality to the extraordinary but by invoking the force of “Glauben.” Truth in the novella is often aligned with the improbable. Yet, as if such a contention were in danger of freeing the novella from its imperative to stick to the regularity of the *Weltlauf* or open it up to the more properly Romantic

program of self-reflexivity, the work's production of its own criterion, A.W. Schlegel abruptly limits the narrative scope of the novella to the non-fantastic and empirical, to the strictures of the real. This limiting occurs, however, always only halfway: the novella retains its embeddedness in the empirical world, which it is allowed to "veredeln" but not, we are told, "über Gebühr" (248). If the world proves to be "anstoßig," for the writer that seeks an immediate model for emulation in its events, the author of the novella, counteracts the world; he serves as a "Gegenmittel" with his "verständige Blick" and "überlegne Ansicht."

The tensions that Schlegel identifies in the novella's poetics of singularity and generality, of regularity and surprise, result, one might say, from the object of its narration: as a genre the novella's central concern is what Goethe famously calls "eine sich ereignete unerhörte Begebenheit."⁵⁴ Since this "unheard-of event" will not always lend itself easily to narrative convention, the novella will face the difficult task of negotiating a relationship between the event (*Begebenheit*) and an order of narrative or social convention given by history (*Gegenbenheit*) if it is to do justice to the singularity or "unheard-of" quality of its event. This is how one might understand Schlegel's unusual formulation the novella constitutes "eine Geschichte außer der Geschichte" (248), a story outside of history which "erzählt folglich merkwürdige Begebenheiten, die gleichsam hinter dem Rücken der bürgerlichen Verfassungen und Anordnungen vorgefallen sind." The novella thus constitutes a curious epistemic and discursive terrain in which a narrative poetics is linked to a project of critical exhibition; of bringing to light an event—or as Tieck understands it, of placing it "in's hellste Licht"—which stands *perforce* in conflict with bourgeois moral, legal, social or economic order.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ Goethe, conversation with Johann Peter Eckermann, January 29, 1827, in *Sämtliche Werke nach Epochen seines Schaffens*, 19:203.

⁵⁵ Tieck, quoted in Helmut Bachmaier, afterword to *Des Lebens Überfluß* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1981), 68.

Superfluous Marvel (Des Lebens Überfluss)

As one of Ludwig Tieck's last novellas, *Des Lebens Überfluß* (1839) might easily have fulfilled Novalis' criteria for a farce of poetic art. In many respects, the novella offers a barely disguised allegory of Romanticism's self-destruction, an ironized last-ditch Romantic effort to poeticize the world by holding the prose of the world at bay. But in its attempt to create an autarkic poetic realm the gesture of withdrawal from the prosaic world which Tieck's novella dramatizes drives, in fact, the Romantic ambition of a (poetic) amalgamation of prose and poetry *ad absurdum*:⁵⁶ the poetic cosmos created in Tieck's novella turns out to be entrenched in prose all the way through – from its intertextual reliance on works of prose literature by authors such as Jean Paul, Cervantes, Chaucer to its fully prosaic plotline (banished lovers in poverty).

The plot of *Des Lebens Überfluss* – a kind of ironic and self-aware riff on the clichéd plot of a romance forbidden for class differences – is quickly told: two banished lovers, the aristocratic Clara and the bourgeois Heinrich, are forced into exile and withdraw entirely into the confines of their meager domestic space and compensate for their economic deprivation and isolation in a gruelingly cold winter by turning their surroundings into a refuge for poetic living and doubling down on their romantic commitment. When their supply of firewood and money dwindles – and the couple is forced to wonder whether their “heiße Liebe” might not be enough to survive the brutally cold winter or put food on their table, the male protagonist, in a final inspired gesture, both solves and exacerbates the situation in another way, fully severing ties to

⁵⁶ Amalgamation or *Verschmelzung* is Schlegel's ideal for the relation between prose and poetry, something he claims that Tieck's mere 'mixing' of the 'metric' and the 'prosaic' does not achieve. Tieck's prose thus can only hint at the Romantic for Schlegel but never fully achieve it. As Hamacher describes it: “Die von Schlegel bei Shakespeare, bei Goethe und Tieck beobachteten Formen der *Vermischung* metrischer und prosaischer Diktion *deuten* zwar, wie er notiert, auf absolut Romantisches hin (LN 688, 827, 1233), realisieren allerdings noch nicht den Imperativ der Poetisierung, deren Ergebnis *Verschmelzung* wäre” (italics in original). Hamacher, “Der Satz der Gattung,” 1175.

the outside ‘prosaic’ world, as he calls it, by sawing and burning the staircase that leads out of the lover’s apartment. If this would seem to be the absolute romantic gesture – intensively enacting the trope of the Romantic hermit – it finally becomes very prosaic when the landlord shows up with the police at the end of the novella seeking restitution for the violation of a property code.⁵⁷ The ruse and turning point of the novella consists in the fact that, despite all concerted efforts to practice what the protagonist calls a philosophy of poverty, what was cast off by the lovers as superfluously prosaic, what was expended or left-behind in order to more fully embrace lack, returns unwittingly: this includes actual prose, the prized first-edition of Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales* that, once “das teuerste Eigentum” of the male protagonist, is sold off in a moment of desperation; but also the good graces of the wife’s aristocratic father who had been the instigator of their exile by condemning the relationship; Heinrich’s long-lost wealthy friend who finds the lovers in hiding only because he recovers the Chaucer edition, which he had previously given as a gift to Heinrich, and in which Heinrich noted both the story of this gift and the story of his impoverished existence in a foreign apartment. And, finally, the lovers receive a hefty return on invested capital, brokered by the old friend, which is described in a word that succinctly cites nearly all theological, moralist, physio- or bio-logical discourses on

⁵⁷ This incredibly prosaic and bourgeois incident – the irruption of a petty quarrel about private property and renter’s rights in the work of a figure who Friedrich Hebbel dubbed the “König der Romantik” – belongs to a larger context of literary property violations with decisive consequence for plots, forms, etc., including the quarrel about property rights in Gottfried Keller’s *Romeo und Julia auf dem Dorfe*, which Benjamin compares to the bourgeois ethics of Goethe’s *Wahlverwandschaften*: “Nicht anders als in den *Wahlverwandschaften* aus dem erschütterten Ehebund geht in der unvergänglichen Novelle *Romeo und Julia auf dem Dorfe* aus dem gebrochenen Eigentumsrechte an einem Acker ein vernichtendes Schicksal hervor.” Walter Benjamin, “Gottfried Keller: Zu Ehren einer kritischen Gesamtausgabe seiner Werke” in *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 2, bk. 1, 287. On the issue of property rights in Keller’s story see Eva Geulen, “Habe und Bleibe in Kellers *Romeo und Julia auf dem Dorfe*” in *Zeitschrift für deutsche Philologie* 129 (2010): 253-264.

superabundance and luxury up till the enlightenment: “wucherndes Kapital.”⁵⁸

Moreover, Tieck’s novella quite literally makes the project of poeticization a matter of the economy of prose in what one could call the last Romantic gesture and the undoing of Romanticism at the same time. Whereas Novalis’ *Heinrich von Ofterding* was Romantic in its attempt to outdo the ‘economic gospel’ of Goethe’s *Meister* by inverting the novel’s economic teleology (the means-ends logic of Goethe’s text) into a logic of pure means and infinite processuality, “wo das Mittel die Hauptsache und das Resultat die Nebensache wird,” mimicking the teleology of the general equivalent money as Joseph Vogl has argued, Tieck’s novella is an attempt to Romantically turn prosaic reality’s lack of poetry into surplus, an attempt at poetic valorization that runs up against value’s *sine qua non*: finitude.⁵⁹ Transfiguring the world (from what one eats to what one is) in *Des Lebens Überfluss* runs up, in other words, against the need it hopes to dispel, or, in the words of the narrator of Tieck’s prior novella *Der junge Tischlermeister* (1836), against “die Bedürfnisse, die prosaische Grundbasis des Lebens.”⁶⁰ *Des Lebens Überfluss* thereby subjects the poetic (represented in Tieck’s novella in Romantic love, the literary text, reading, and conversation) to the most prosaic of circumstances – absolute deprivation – in the hopes of reaching a state that lacks lack, a way of retaining prose without the prosaic. “Die dürftigste Nahrung fristete ihr [the lovers] Leben, aber im Bewusstsein ihrer Liebe war keine Entbehrung, auch der drückendste Mangel nicht fähig, ihre Zufriedenheit zu stören”

⁵⁸ “Dein Kapital [. . .] hat in Indien so gewuchert, daß Du Dich jetzt einen reichen Mann nennen kannst.” Tieck, *Schriften*, 12:246.

⁵⁹ On how finitude – through the figure of scarcity – comes to shape value see Foucault’s discussion of Ricardo in *Order of Things*, 275-286.

⁶⁰ Tieck, *Schriften*, 11:57. A more detailed discussion would have to situate this prosaic need in the context of Hegel’s thoughts on prose in his aesthetic lectures and the “System der Bedürfnisse” in his philosophy of right. On the latter in relation to the problem of poverty and luxury, see Frank Ruda, *Hegels Pöbel: Eine Untersuchung der “Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts.”* See also Birger Priddat, *Hegel Als Ökonom*.

(Tieck, *Schriften*, 12: 230). “Entbehrung,” together with insolvency – the exhaustion of all means, as quoted at the beginning of this chapter – ironically becomes the (prosaic) trope through which the lover’s attempt to create a poetic cosmos inside their apartment. If *Offerding* preaches its own economic gospel (i.e. not that of *Wilhelm Meister*) of Romantic poetry that exceeds a prosaic logic of exchange, and thus, imagines itself as a surplus, indeed as *überflüssig* to the world of prose, Tieck’s novella spins this Romantic gospel precisely in the other direction, namely towards lack. The economic gospel in Tieck’s novella becomes, only a decade before Proudhon’s similarly titled work, a “Philosophie der Armut” – in this way, I note, the novella runs the entire spectrum of poverty’s philosophical heritage, from the medieval valorization of poverty in monastic forms of life to poverty’s condemnation as a source of vice and inhumanity in the moral philosophies of the Enlightenment,⁶¹ to its emergence as the central ‘social question’ of the nineteenth century, as Hannah Arendt will call it, in Hegel, Marx, and early Socialism. This philosophy of poverty, in a direct inversion of Novalis, makes not poetry but the prosaic world/world of prose the source of *Überfluss*, of extravagant waste. But – and herein lies the ironic refraction of the story – insofar as this philosophy of poverty attempts to dispel the prosaic world altogether, casting it off as superfluous, it reveals itself to be *überflüssig* in another sense, namely frivolous, premised as this philosophy of poverty is on the disavowal of any urgent need or lack.⁶² “Um in diesem Zustande fortzuleben, war aber der sonderbare *Leichtsinn* dieser beiden

⁶¹ On monastic poverty as a form of life see Giorgio Agamben, *The Highest Poverty: Monastic Rules and Form-of-Life*, esp. 123-143.

⁶² In this regard the lover’s philosophy of poverty could be read to do what Novalis writes of Wilhelm Meister: retard the economic gospel. “Retardieren,” or retardation is a term Novalis, borrowing from *Wilhelm Meister*, uses to describe the poetic movement of the novel. In Tieck’s novella the retardation of economic exigency or need goes by the name of a different poetic term from Goethe, namely “Schonung,” which Tieck takes from Goethe’s *Unterhaltungen deutscher Ausgewanderten*. On Tieck’s use of Goethe’s word *Schonung* see Oesterle, who writes: Die ‘gesellige Schonung’ ist bei Goethe ein Sozialverhalten nach einem Verlust; sie ist ein lebenspraktischer Vermeidungs-, Linderungs- und Heilungsversuch” (251). Ingrid Oesterle, “Ludwig Tieck: *Des lebens Überfluss*.” As Oesterle argues,

Menschen notwendig, die alles über der Gegenwart und dem Augenblick vergessen konnten” (*Schriften* 12:230, italics mine). Need and superfluosity, or lack and plenty, become terms through which Tieck can probe the possibility of poetry in prosaic circumstances and the extent to which poetic valorization is possible before it lapses into frivolity. For an author who sees the genre of the novella as the privileged locus for staging the struggle of prose and poetry, the ordinary and the marvelous, the extravagant expenditure of poetry and the prudent economy of prose, the poetic valorization of prose operates in *Des Lebens Überfluss* as a kind of inverted reality check: can art instantiate a reality that is both entirely within prosaic life and at once above it? The value problem, in this context, is the paradox of *needing* art to be something more without it becoming merely *superfluous*.

Tieck’s novella addresses the problem of value across multiple registers (the value of life, the value of literature, the values of society) at the end of a Romantic project of potentiation. Set in Restoration Germany, against a backdrop of political, social, and aesthetic unrest, the novella’s value problem is inseparable from the collapse of the value paradigm of the *Ständegesellschaft*, a contextual fact that becomes clear in the novella’s subtext: a relationship condemned on the basis of a value difference (aristocratic/bourgeois). The flight into a “notgedrungene Philosophie der Armut” (248) – and away from the world of prose – is articulated explicitly as a problem of value: as the protagonist exclaims, “die Welt hat mich und ich habe die Welt in dem Grade verlassen, daß kein Mensch meinen Wert mit irgendeiner namhaften Summe würde taxieren wollen” (227). In this regard, the novella must be read, as one

Tieck sheds the ‘social’ character of *Schonung* since, in his novel, the social setting of the novelistic community that exchanges stories is no longer possible.

critic calls it, as the most subtle political novella of its time.⁶³ The decisive ruse of Tieck's novella, however, is to, on the one hand reveal poetry to be *überflüssig* in the sense of frivolous, and, on the other hand, to point to its necessity in a lacking world of prose.

The irony of Tieck's reflection on the value of literature in a prosaic world, and with it the fate of the poetic, depends on turning an austerity program into a "philosophy of poverty" that would claim a special status for poetic existence and the existence of the poetic in a prosaic and bourgeois realm of value relations. This philosophy of poverty thus counterintuitively relies on a term that would seem far removed from deprivation: overabundance or superfluity. As its title already announces, Tieck's novella grapples in the literary text with what in cameralist and physiocratic discourses, but also in semiotic and linguistic discourses, around 1800 becomes a if not the pivotal problem regarding value (of commodities, of money, of words): the separation of the necessary from the superfluous. The debates on luxury that preoccupy late 18th-century semioticians, moral philosophers, statesmen, physicians, and literary authors alike pivot around the question of how to manage and bring order to what is superfluous, excessive, extravagant, or sumptuous in a citizen's consumptive behavior (whether the commodity is books or pearls),⁶⁴ in a craftsman's production, for the wealth of the nation, or for the health of the individual and

⁶³ In this regard, this chapter also contributes to a growing trend in Tieck scholarship to read the author's work against longstanding accusations of his political backwardness and retroactive conservative views – accusations inaugurated perhaps by Heine's damning account of the early Romantics, repeated in Carl Schmitt's critique of political Romanticism, exacerbated by the National Socialist instrumentalization of Romanticism's nationalistic-pastoral undertones and the conservative literary criticism of the likes of Benno von Wiese. One of the most recent and forceful of such attempts to reread Tieck is Patrick Eiden-Offe's *Poesie der Klasse*. Agamben's rather surprising reference to Tieck in his early *Infancy and History* might also be seen as the beginning of a new take on the political stakes of Tieck's work amongst the Left. See Giorgio Agamben, *Infancy and History: The Destruction of Experience*.

⁶⁴ On the influence of these questions, as they arose in debates on physiocratic economic thought in Germany at the end of the eighteenth century, on aesthetic matters see Richard Gray's extensive chapter "Economics and the Imagination" in *Money Matters*, 109-169. The chapter also includes a brief discussion of Tieck's *Künstlerroman*, *Franz Sternbalds Wanderungen*. See also Matt Erlin, *Necessary Luxuries*.

collective body. This task is moreover central to that biopolitical apparatus that goes by the name of Police or *Polizei* in cameralism around this time.⁶⁵ The issue of the superfluous, doubly coded at the time as the extravagant and luxurious and simply waste or unnecessary excess, raises, in the context of these debates, questions about whether the value of a good is indexed to need (the problem of relation between a diamond worth much and water worth little – the central value paradox of enlightenment economics, as Joseph Vogl has suggested) or whether need can only be met through a surplus that assuages lack and motivates trade but also threatens to overshoot the necessary and go unused; in short, the question becomes: does superfluosity indicate the high value of a thing or word, or its frivolity? And is it necessary for the well-tuned functioning of a market or semiotic economy? In a reading of one of the major figures who pursues this question in linguistics and economics at the time – the French philosopher of language Condillac – Derrida outlines the problem of lack and plenty, need and surplus as such:

“The effect of overabundance produced by what supplies the lack gives rise to commerce, both economic and linguistic, as well as to trade and to the frivolity of chitchat. This effect produces in both fields the same objects: merchandise, money, the token or idea, the full sign, the empty sign. But founded upon need alone, this economy can nevertheless function, or at least trade, only insofar as it produces a useless supplement, an overabundance.”⁶⁶

⁶⁵ See for instance Klaus Mladek (ed.), *Police Forces: A Cultural History of an Institution* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), especially therein Joseph Vogl, “State Desire: On the Epoch of the Police,” 47-76. See also Caygill’s history of the structural relationship between aesthetics and the police state advocated by *Polizewissenschaft*. Caygill posits similarities in the role played by taste and the police in preventing sumptuousness. Howard Caygill, *Art of Judgement*.

⁶⁶ Jacques Derrida, *The Archeology of the Frivolous*, 103. Condillac would later become a target of Marx’s critique of political economy for this concept of an unnecessary surplus. For Marx Condillac is, in fact, guilty of the central confusion of exchange and use value that reproduces itself in bourgeois political economy again and again, and which, Marx argues, leads to the fallacious idea that surplus value derives from exchange. While Condillac, anticipating theories of marginal utility – as Foucault points out in *The Order of Things* – suggests that exchange is premised on trading something superfluous for something necessary and that the circulation of commerce is therefore the source of increases in value, Marx adamantly insists on the exchange of equal goods and since “man zahlt die Waren nicht doppelt, das eine mal ihren Gebrauchswert, das andre Mal ihren Wert,” and since “keiner mehr Wert aus der Zirkulation heraus[zieht], als er in sie hineinwirft” “findet keine Bildung von Mehrwert statt.” *Das Kapital*, 173-175.

What Derrida refers to here is a common idea in eighteenth-century political economy that trade only happens when there is a surplus, a quantity of a thing produced that is not exhausted by the needs of its producers. This founding myth of trade becomes, in Derrida's hands, a cipher for supplementarity as such: the supplement of production – the unit to be traded – implies that need can never be satisfied, that lack will always persist. The necessity of the superfluous is, in other words, what animates an economy designed to fill a lack, indeed what generates this economy in the first place. This means, moreover, that lack is the source of a non-lack.⁶⁷

When Tieck titles his novella *Des Lebens Überfluss*, and thereby juxtaposes what in these debates passed as a codeword for need, "Leben", to its opposite, "Überfluss", he writes a story that wonders about, as the last line of the story suggests, "den Inhalt des menschlichen Lebens, dessen Bedürfnis, Überfluss und Geheimnis" (249). Indeed the attempt in Tieck's novella to carve out a space for poetic existence in which need and scarcity lose their meaning can be read as a response to discourses on luxury and frivolity in eighteenth-century moral philosophy which addressed, as in Condillac, the high value of useless objects such as the diamond. But Tieck has left the terrain of the discourse network around 1800. His story asks instead whether need itself – and by extension life – could be made superfluous, and paradoxically this will involve not the production of an overabundance, out of 'supplying a lack', but producing lack out of a perceived overabundance, the name of which, in Romantic fashion, is love.

On the notion of a necessary surplus in Condillac and more generally for a discussion of the figure of an excess or overabundance in paradigms of (bodily and financial) circulation in the eighteenth century see Albrecht Korschorke, *Körperströme und Schriftverkehr*, especially "Ökonomie des Überschusses," 66-76.

⁶⁷ On this problem see, too, Foucault, *Order of Things*, 211.

The Love-Child of Lack and Plenty: Eros

The irony of Tieck's novella depends on the lovers' efforts to cope with their circumstances by imagining them or misrecognizing them as better than they are, and by supplementing their material lack with the immaterial, but infinitely substantial bond of love that turns their lack into plenty: "Wir entbehren fast alles . . . nur uns selbst nicht" or "So ist die Armut mit unsrer Liebe eins geworden" (195). In their state of lack, their Romantic love "muß . . . alles ersetzen" (204) and as a supplement or substitute for "alles," love becomes the principle by which they can expend with everything else, indeed cut themselves off from the outside world. They imagine love as the absolute substitute. Precisely this logic is what will be tested in Tieck's novella when the 'philosophy of poverty' proves to be not a cancellation of need but itself, in fact, "notgedrungen" (248).

While the politics of this philosophy of poverty lies in the attempt to renounce need as itself superfluous against the absolute erotic minimum, this is not the 'irresistable' politics of the poor that, as Hannah Arendt has suggested, aims at 'liberation from life's necessities.'⁶⁸ It rests instead on a poeticizing dimension that is less about abolishing deprivation or insolvency, compensating for this prosaic lack, than it is about the procedure by which this material lack is stripped of meaning, rendered insignificant in comparison to the immaterial 'satisfaction' of what the novella names 'heiße Liebe.' Of course in the next move, this lack proves itself to be the (necessary) foil against which this poetic valorization of poverty can occur: "Wir entbehren fast alles, nur uns selbst nicht" – the key word here is "fast" – a lack that is almost a lack is, as it were, not a lack but a deficiency that requires supplementation. In the logic of the lovers, the fact that they have each other is a fact that erases "Entbehrung" altogether: "im Bewusstsein ihrer

⁶⁸ Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution*, 114.

Liebe war keine Entbehrung, auch der drückendste Mangel nicht fähig, ihre Zufriedenheit zu stören” (230). Through this logic of love as substitution, Tieck’s novella offers a critique of the Romantic absolute, transposing it into the context of economic need. If the Romantic absolute is a logic of being unconditionally set free, or, like the fragment, of breaking off from the whole,⁶⁹ Tieck’s novella suggests that in the economy of this absolution, the richness of the Romantic trope (i.e love) gains its contours only against the misère of limitation. In other words the absolute, Tieck’s novella suggests, is meaningful only in its conditioning by a finite world.⁷⁰

Indeed what makes having each other possible in the way the lovers imagine it is the very fact of “Entbehrung” – “So ist die Armut mit unserer Liebe eins geworden.” In this logic of a hot love that renders death by cold impossible, the double sense of “Entbehrung” becomes clear: what one lacks or is deprived of (money, food, etc.) is what one can, in a second move, afford to dispense with.⁷¹ Through Romantic love material need is rendered both necessary and

⁶⁹ Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Literary Absolute*, 56.

⁷⁰ This point would have to be connected to Jean Paul’s definition of the idyll, particularly since Jean Paul is one of the major referents of Tieck’s novella. The idyll belongs within this economy as the expression of inner freedom under circumstances of external limitation. In a certain German literary tradition exemplified by Jean Paul, the idyll is the literary genre *par excellence* of a prosaic economy: Jean Paul’s Quintus Fixlein is a paradigm of the idyll not as a world devoid of need, longing, destitution or conflict but of the idyll against the horizon of absolute restriction. Indeed in Jean Paul the idyll is defined as “die epische Darstellung des Vollgücks in der Beschränkung” (*Werke*, 5:257). If what an economy is depends, as Blumenberg writes, on what is considered to be scarce or limited, one could say Jean Paul’s idylls offer a kind of absolute economy of life in miniature; for what is scarce or limited varies: “Die Beschränkung in der Idylle kann sich bald auf die der Güter, bald der Einsichten, bald des Standes, bald aller zugleich bezeichnen” (*Werke*, 5:257). What is, however, not limited is happiness itself. Similar then to Jean Paul’s idylls, Tieck’s story depicts the protagonist’s complete happiness in absolute destitution: “Wer in ganz Europa ist wohl so glücklich, als ich mich mit vollem Recht und aus der ganzen Kraft meines Gefühles neben darf” (Tieck, *Schriften*, 12:195). The ruse of the idyllic transformation in Tieck’s novella lies in turning destitution into a relative problem, more a matter of perception than reality. Unlike Jean Paul’s idylls, in which characters paradoxically and humoristically downgrade their expectations of happiness by exaggerating their misery, Tieck’s characters disavow theirs. As Paul Fleming suggests, in Jean Paul “the essence of the microscopic amusement is to ask for so little and get so much from it.” Fleming, *The Pleasures of Abandonment*.

⁷¹ Tieck’s novella knows both senses: “Entbehrung” as lack/deprivation and “Entbehrung” as dispensable goods. The latter sense can be seen in the maid who sacrifices for the lovers “alles nur irgend Entbehrliche,” i.e. anything she can do without/anything dispensable. The former sense is marked by

insignificant at once, finitude usurped by the infinite, such that the lovers can later reflect on their “vormalige Elend” as “zugleich unendliches Glück” (249). This is, moreover, precisely how Novalis defined romanticization: giving the finite the semblance of the infinite. What Tieck’s novella will do, however, is expose the infinite as itself finite. Deprivation isn’t a lack that is assuaged by the overabundance of love – the lack persists forcefully - but love is that surplus that makes need a matter of complete indifference, or, more radically and paradoxically, love needs need in order to distinguish itself as not simply superfluous.

This is quite obviously a dubious political program but not one that is meant to be taken seriously – in fact, the novella might be read as a critique of the kind of aesthetic ideology propagated by this philosophy of poverty. The ironic refraction of the text exposes what lies behind the frivolous poeticization of poverty: a desperation (which itself is refracted by laughter) and a subjective basis for evaluating the economic situation. What Tieck’s novella is doing when it turns love – famously in Plato the child of lack and plenty – into the basis for an embrace of poverty’s richness and for a renunciation of everything *prosaic*, including need, as superfluous, is questioning the *value* of an earlier literary program in Romanticism and attempting to develop a hermeneutics of life that would situate the poetic not in opposition to the prosaic but within it.

Cynicism and Asceticism

Tieck’s novella, in the mid-19th century, uses the poverty or insolvency of the cynic and ascetic to raise questions about the value and politics of prose and in doing so will develop a

everything the lovers lack: the items that the lovers pawn off to survive before running out completely of anything to pawn are referred to as the “die vielfachen Bequemlichkeiten, die wir gewohnt waren und die wir nun entbehren mußten”. Paradoxically, it is the maid who has dispensible goods whereas what the lovers dispense of is called lack. On the category of dispensible goods and other “Bequemlichkeiten” see Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *Das Paradies, der Geschmack und die Vernunft: Eine Geschichte Der Genussmittel*.

hermeneutics of life that assigns these question of value a central place.

In his monumental *Philosophie des Geldes*, published in 1900, Georg Simmel offers a kind of psychic typology of what he calls “Geldkultur.”⁷² Following his arguments about money as the most extreme example of the “Auswachsen der Mittel zu Zwecken” (229), Simmel charts the emergence of a motley crew of economic types that catalogue the various ways in which in a ‘money culture’ money can switch from an absolute means, the “reinste Beispiel des Werkzeugs” (197), to an end: these types include the miser, the spendthrift, the ascetic, the cynic, and the blasé. While they differ dramatically in their specific handlings with money – the miser hoards it, the spendthrift lavishes it, the ascetic renounces it, the cynic embraces its leveling capacity, and the blasé doesn’t care about it. What unites them is the way in which they make money’s specific teleology their own or negate this teleology altogether; in the case of the cynicism: the cynic finds in money’s indifference, its capacity to reduce a plurality of values to one register and level all hierarchies of values, the grounds for a destruction of value *tout court*. Simmel’s types are remarkable for how they embody the combination of a psychological economic comportment with what Simmel will call a ‘style of life’ and aim at a transvaluation of monetary value. In the case the ascetic: if monetary value is a final purpose in a money culture, the rejection of money turns it into an absolute value, Simmel argues: rejecting money becomes a means to reject the world: “die Armut [ist] zu einem eifersüchtig gehüteten Besitz, zu einem kostbaren Stück in dem Wertinventar dieses, aller Mannigfaltigkeit und Interessiertheit der Welt abgewandten Daseins geworden. Im Gelde war der einheitliche Wert gegeben, mit dessen Ablehnung gerade alle Vielheit der Welt abgelehnt war” (331). As Simmel will go on to say, the Franciscans who are characterized as *nihil habentes, omnia possidentes* (having nothing and

⁷² Georg Simmel, *Die Philosophie des Geldes*, 263.

possessing everything) – a citation of Paul’s Second Letter to the Corinthians – mark the moment when poverty loses its ascetic character: “die inneren Güter, zu deren Gewinn [die Armut] die negative Bedingung bildete, sind zu ihr selbst [die Franziskaner] herabgestiegen, der Verzicht auf das Mittel, das der Welt sonst als der volle Repräsentant ihrer Endzwecke gilt, hat die gleiche Steigerung zu einem definitiven Werte erfahren” (332). In this way, Simmel can, paradoxically and analogically, read in the ascetic’s form of life, a more general socio-psychological process: “Die ungeheure und ausgreifende Macht des Prozesses, durch den das Geld aus seiner Mittlerstellung zu der Bedeutung eines Absoluten aufsteigt, kann durch nichts ein schärferes Licht erhalten als dadurch, daß die Verneinung seines Sinnes sich zu der gleichen Form steigert.” Having nothing becomes possessing everything when the ascetic’s disavowal of a paradigmatic means, money, is made into another means to a higher, or the highest, value. In both cases, the cynic and ascetic, Simmel is describing a kind of negative symbiosis – though one that he doesn’t exactly ground historically: both figures in their poverty and distance to money bring about a transvaluation of values that in fact depends on or mirrors money’s own value-form. The cynic and the ascetic that Simmel describe have, of course, in particular become in a more radical way important paradigms of late for how an impoverished form-of-life might signal political alternatives to the sovereign rule of law that characterizes modern biopolitics. Foucault will make the cynic, in his destitution, the basis for a type of truth-speaking, *parrhesia*, that as a certain political exercise of freedom entails a challenge to the rule of law (in the polis, in the agora, in the public); Agamben will see in Franciscan poverty the basis for a form-of-life that in its practice, a kind of use, could escape the sovereign appropriation of life. While Simmel extracts the cynic and the ascetic from the development of a modern money culture, viewing them as living expressions of – and not exactly challenges to – a dominant regime of value;

Foucault and Agamben embrace these figures for their political potential to challenge prevailing regimes of power.

In its emphasis on overabundance and by ending the story with rampant capital, Tieck's novella both cites and modifies the practice of the cynic and the ascetic, condensing this practice into the single dramatic gesture of burning the staircase that connects the protagonist lovers to the outside world. In their pursuit of a higher value, their love, they remove themselves from a world that condemns their union on the basis of a value difference: one is bourgeois, the other aristocratic. Removal from the world is then tied to a project not so much of leveling that difference as sublating it in a higher spiritual realm of the marital bond (and Tieck's text cites here the master text that crowns marriage as Romantic love, Friedrich Schlegel's *Lucinde*). In contrast to the ascetic, however, the two live in poverty not as an expression of world-removal but as its banal result: unable to earn a living in the outside world, they live in near deprivation, subsisting on the income that comes from pawning their possessions or on the food delivered to them from a kind of subaltern third-figure: the wife's former maid. In this way, as the wife remarks, "So ist die Armut mit unsrer Liebe eins geworden" (195). Indeed, this conflation of love and poverty becomes the basis for their philosophy of poverty, which they adopt as a life mantra. Notably, their love leads not to a retreat into a transcendent sphere beyond life (as for instance in Romeo and Juliet's case), into the otherworldly, but involves a turning inward to life. As the husband proclaims, the moment when they fled together marks the point at which their "Schicksal [ist] auf unsre Lebenszeit bestimmt. Lieben und leben hieß nun unsre Losung; wie wir leben würden, dürfte uns ganz gleichgültig sein" (194).

Heinrich, the husband, ironically articulates this philosophy of poverty as a reappraisal and critique of what he sees to be the prevailing value relations in the society from which they

are removed, a society that in Tieck's novella bears all the traces of Biedermeier Germany:

“Man kann auch ohne Servietten leben. Wenn ich bedenke, wie unsere Lebensweise immer mehr und mehr in Surrogat, Stellvertretung und Lückenbüßerei übergegangen ist, so bekomme ich einen rechten Haß auf unser geiziges und knickernes Jahrhundert und fasse, da ich es ja haben kann, den Entschluß, in der Weise unsrer viel freigebigern Altvordern zu leben. Diese elenden Servietten sind ja, was selbst die heutigen Engländer noch wissen und verachten, offenbar nur erfunden, um das Tischtuch zu schonen. Ist es also Großmut, das Tischtuch nicht zu achten, so gehe ic darin noch weiter, das Tafeltuch zusamt den Serviette für überflüssig zu erklären. Beides wird verkauft, um vom saubern Tische selbst zu essen, nach Weise der Patriarchen, nach Art der – nun? welcher Vötkler? Gleichviel! Essen doch viele Menschen selbst ohne Tisch. Und, wie gesagt, ich treibe dergleichen nicht aus zynischer Sparsamkeit, nach Art des Diogenes, aus dem Hause, sondern im Gegenteil im Gefühl meines Wohlstandes, um nur nicht, wie die jetzige Zeit, aus törichtem Sparen zum Verschwender zu werden” (197).

The lover's philosophy of poverty, the results or their asceticism, is here combined with an inverted riff on Greek cynicism; on the level of language, in the twists and turns of the passage (from makeshifting to greed to generosity to superfluity to frugality to squandering), one sees how the text moves towards a point at which the very difference between superfluity and dearth, plenty and lack, wealth and deprivation, might collapse. The attempt to declare less as more is always fraught with contradictions. If this philosophy of poverty in its 'feeling of wealth' dreams of exiting the economy of overabundance altogether, it constantly runs up against material limits; the ascetic act of burning the staircase, meant too to be a declaration against the “Überflüssigkeiten des Lebens,” against “leeren Luxus” and “unnützen Erfindungen” (240) – indeed the staircase figures as a symbol of the “armseligen, prosaischen Approximation einer so gemeinen Stufenleiter der Begriffe” (237) that only the rational empiricist needs, a kind of declaration of the poverty of experience as Agamben says of Tieck's story in *Infancy and History*⁷³ – lasts only until the true adjudicators of need and luxury arrive – the police. And indeed the attempt to not need anything – the complete autarky of love – cannot get rid of

⁷³ Agamben, *Infancy and History*, 15-16.

necessity altogether, when the protagonist declares the staircase as superfluous as a justification of his ‘consumption’ of it to the police and landlord, he is forced to concede: “ Ich brauchte indeß das Holz höchst nötig” (240). It is, in fact, the landlord who exposes this philosophy of poverty as ridiculous and frivolous when the protagonist for the second time draws a connection between his form-of-life and that of Diogenes. The protagonist remarks: “ Ist es, wie so viele Weltweise behaupten, edel, seine Bedürfnisse einzuschränken, sich selbst zu genügen, so hat dieser für mich völlig unnütze Anbau mich vor dem Erfrieren gerettet. Haben Sie niemals gelesen, wie Diogenes seinen hölzernen Becher wegwarf, als er gesehen, wie ein Bauer Wasser mit der hohlen Hand schöpfte und so trank” (240-241)? The landlord replies: “Sie führen aberwitzige Reden [. . .] ich sah einen Kerl, der hielt die Schnauze gleich an das Rohr und trank so Wasser; somit hätte sich Ihr Mosje Diogenes auch noch die Hand abhauen können ” (241). What is the limit to this vicious circle? At what point does this philosophy of poverty become simply impoverished?

Tieck’s novella demonstrates how a poetic irony can lapse into a kind of aesthetic ideology by exposing how the move towards absolute renunciation threatens to renounce even the surplus value of austerity and to commit that kind of thinking in resemblances for which, in Foucault’s account, Don Quixote stands.⁷⁴ Given that the novella’s philosophy of poverty is tied to a whole network of literary references that constitute something like the canon of a Romantic literary corpus (Jean Paul, Goethe, Shakespeare, Chaucer, Cervantes), the novella poses the question: to what degree is this philosophy of poverty, in its attempt to be poetry in the prosaic, a revival of an older form from these texts (one that would make prosaic reality into poetic literature)? Or is the contemporary novella, in being unable to truly accomplish what those

⁷⁴ See Foucault, *Order of Things*, 46-50.

master-texts that precede it could, simply worthless literature, as devalued as the protagonist is in a dream in which he is auctioned off together with “Tagesschriftstellern” as a “Lump, [der] nichts wert [ist]” (223, 222)?

The height of a conflation of a literature and reality that seeks to paper over lack comes in a scene where the lovers read the ice crystals that form on their apartment window in the cold as a “Hauch,” a “süßer Atem” of love, describing them at the same time with recourse to simile as “Gespenster” written “wie mit Leichenschrift” (199). In this scene, the ice crystals formed by frost on their window – signs of their impending destitution – become, in what one could call the last ‘gasp’ of Romanticism, signs of the richness of their Romantic bond of love and of the “Geisterdialog” that forms the basis for marriage as the union of two souls. This transfiguration of a sign of material lack (no wood) into a sign of immaterial plenty (hot love – “es ist undenkbar, dass wir erfrieren sollten bei so heißer liebe”) is accompanied by the self-reflexive transfiguration of reality into a poetic text that can be read. As Detlev Kremer reads the scene under the rubric of “Romantik als Re-Lektüre”, the iced-over window not only suppresses the ‘real capacity’ of a window to offer a view of the outside but in Heinrich’s act of reading draws the gaze back inward into the imaginative and literary space of the attic apartment: “Nicht nur, dass das Fenster entgegen seiner sonstigen Funktion, keinen Blick nach außen ermöglicht: Es wird zur weißen Fläche, in die sich die Schrift einschreibt. In einem präzisen Wortsinn erscheint in Tiecks Reversion der Frühromantik der literarische Text als diejenige Grenze, die kein Außen hat.”⁷⁵

The recoding of reality as literature, of the prosaic as poetic, is a gesture that repeats itself in many forms in the novel and one that cites the original ideological confusion of reality and

⁷⁵ Detlev Kremer, “Späte Prosa” in *Ludwig Tieck: Leben, Werk, Wirkung*, 576.

literature in Don Quixote, which Foucault in quasi-Romantic fashion will make the very basis of capital-L literature through Quixote's 'quest for similitudes' after the breakdown of an episteme premised on resemblances between signs. In other words, the question becomes: is poverty in prose not the source of a kind of surplus but simply a frivolous romantic gesture. Is the entire program just Romantic chit-chat, as Derrida would call it. How else is a sentence to be interpreted such as: "es ist undenkbar, daß wir erfrieren sollten bei so heißer Liebe, bei so warmen Blut! Pur unmöglich!" (195)? Appropriately and as a sign of frivolity, the response here is the protagonist's own laughter- not the laughter of Romantic Witz or wit – but a laughter out of 'purer Bosheit' (195) that is however "darum noch nicht das Lachen der Verzweiflung" (195).

This laughter seems to make a mockery of the Franciscan motto, *nihil habentes, Omnia possidentes*. As Augustine notes in *The City of God*, this motto relies on a rhetorical device of *contrario*, achieving in its "graceful display of antithesis" a beauty in words that mirrors God's beautiful oppositions in the universe.⁷⁶ Directly after citing Paul's use of the Latin phrase in the Second Letter to Corinthians, Augustine writes: "Just as the opposition of contraries bestows beauty upon language, then, so is the beauty of this world enhanced by the opposition of contraries, composed, as it were, by an eloquence not of words, but of things." Tieck's use of oppositions also points to a higher realm in which hot love could be set against bitter cold in the same way that "Good is set against evil; and life against death", as Augustine quotes Ecclesiasticus, but this higher realm is no longer the beautiful universe under god's ordinance: it's the wordly, frivolous laughter at dire straits, a laughter situated fully within the prosaic and which thus threatens to be nothing more than an 'eloquence of words'.

⁷⁶ Augustine, *The City of God*, 472.

The Hermeneutic Circle of Life

Tieck's novella has a figure for how opposites collapse into one another, how nothing becomes everything, etc. which it calls the "Fabel des Lebens" (197). Heinrich reads this fable aloud from his diary, as the one piece of literature he still left, itself a fable of (his) life that he reads backwards: "Man hat ein Märchen, daß ein wütender Verbrecher, zum Hungertode verdammt, sich selber nach und nach aufspeiset [. . .] Dort blieb am Ende nur der Magen und das Gebiß übrig, bei uns bleibt die Seele wie sie das Unbegreifliche nennen. Ich aber habe auch, was das Äußerliche betrifft, in ähnlicher Weise mich abgestreift und abgelebt" (198). This figure of a gradual self-consumption describes not only the process of "abstreifen" and "ableben" that the lovers make into a cynical philosophy of poverty – one that recalls Diogenes' own stripping down as life praxis. It also connects to another figure of self-consumption in the novella, one which is framed as an interpretative exercise, indeed itself a hermeneutics of life insofar as Heinrich describes it as the reading practice (of a hermeneutic circle) he employs to read his diary:

Immer muß alles echte Wissen, alles Kunstwerk und gründliche Denken in einen Kreis zusammenschlagen und Anfang und Ende innigst vereinigen, wie die Schlange, die sich in den Schwanz beißt – ein Sinnbild der Ewigkeit, wie Andre sagen: ein Symbol des Verstandes und alles Richtigen, wie ich behaupte (196).

This remark frames as reading practice what the poetic poverty of the lovers strives for as life practice. Through these two connected figures – the fable and hermeneutics, text and interpretation of life – Tieck's novella offers a kind of materialist spin on Schleiermacher's idealist hermeneutics. The 'nach und nach' of the hermeneutic process which, in its own economy, forges a relation of parts to a whole is grotesquely inverted into a gradual reduction, an "ableben" that is also the "Entbehrung" of the lover's philosophy of poverty: beginning and end do not fit together seamlessly but produce something "unbegreiflich" as the surplus to what is

consumed. In this light, the attempt to make less more, to turn having nothing into possessing everything, and thereby close the circle, uniting opposites (beginning and end), is an attempt to leave a remainder, a surplus, that would not be frivolous but substantial. This perverse or abject image of a self-consumed body that leaves behind only stomach and jaw – the bodily organs necessary for the consumption of food – likens the production of ‘ineffable’ or “unbegreifliches” waste or *Überfluss* to the process of reading.

This figure of the self-consuming life points, moreover, to a kind of anthropological economy that is in the process of being overhauled at the beginning of the nineteenth century. What the fable of life names the soul or “das Unbegreifliche” – what is left behind after the cycle of self-devouring – is what early Romantic philosophical anthropologies would have hoped to define. But in Tieck’s undoing of Romanticism, the ineffable soul has turned into the stomach and jaw that the move towards the infinite (the snake biting its own tail) leaves behind. Tieck’s novella fuses the economic concern about luxury, overabundance, and lack – a central preoccupation of moral philosophers, economists, and statesmen at the end of the eighteenth century – with a notion of anthropological or biological economy (one could almost say an ecology) that is beginning to shape the discourse in the life sciences as Lamarck is working it out in his 1809 *Philosophie Zoologique* and Darwin in his *On the Origin of Species* in 1859 – Malthus provides the link between population economy (biopolitics) and ecological or biological economy. Indeed, Malthus will turn this abject image into a law of political economy by suggesting that the surplus population (society’s waste) be eaten. At stake in Tieck’s fable of life is thus, as Eva Horn has formulated it for Malthus’ project, a critique of the “central tenets of

Enlightenment anthropology, mainly the idea of the perfectibility of human society.”⁷⁷

More important for this context, however, is how the trope of the self-consuming life, the reduction to bare bones that nevertheless leaves behind an *Überfluss* is, in fact, part and parcel of literature’s value problem for Tieck. Notwithstanding Tieck’s rejection of the moniker Romantic, opting instead for poetic, his novella combines the project of Romanticism – Novalis’ Romantic “Operation” by which one lends “dem Gemeinen einen hohen Sinn, dem Gewöhnlichen ein geheimnisvolles Ansehn, dem Bekannten die Würde des Unbekannten, dem Endlichen einen unendlichen Schein” – with the poetics of the novella – A. W. Schlegel’s definition of the novella as a non-excessive ennobling of the ordinary or prosaic. This is why the novella has to bring poverty into prose in a paradoxical task of turning its prose into a necessary surplus: can it be the prose of the world that it must be and more (poetic) at the same time? Can it close the circle, linking the highest and lowest poverty, and generate a surplus of ‘soul’? Tieck’s novella is ultimately, however, not a bad piece of aesthetic ideology, transfiguring the finitude of poverty by lending it a semblance of the infinite, to paraphrase Novalis. It is transfiguration exposed: the semblance of poetic infinity in the finite is in the philosophy of poverty revealed to be itself impoverished. Insolvency involves facing the fact that all means are exhausted, perhaps even literary ones.

Novelistic Chit-Chat – Policing the Frivolous

While Tieck’s novella cites Chaucer’s Ur-novella, it is in fact another archetypal novella that through exile first raises the question of superfluosity and literature but does so, in typical fashion for the novella, against the backdrop of a crisis, namely the plague that threatens to decay

⁷⁷ Eva Horn, “The Last Man: The Birth of Modern Apocalypse in Jean Paul, John Martin, and Lord Byron.”

the moral and social common. The frame of Boccaccio's *Decameron*, shot through with the rhetoric of dietetics, tells of an arsenal of prophylactic measures against the plague that range from the ascetic to the extravagant: "to live temperately and to avoid excesses of all kinds",⁷⁸ avoiding excessive delectation in food and drink and removing oneself from the ill, is one solution; the other is "to carouse and make merry and go about singing and frolicking and satisfying one's appetite in every possible way, and laughing and jeering at whatever happened." As frame, the *brigata*, and with it, the project of storytelling, does not fall under either an austere or extravagant measure against the plague but represents an exceptionalized order that organizes and manages the distinction between these measures, between austerity or deprivation and excess or overabundance more generally; indeed the stories, designed as pastime and edification, frequently concern the hand of Fortuna in turning lack into plenty and plenty into lack. Tieck's novella, inheriting this project, is in contrast to the *Decameron* plagued by the possible *frivolity* of the storytelling project as such. Before it turns to the lover's rejection of life's superfluosness in an embrace of its abundance, avowing a form-of-life that eschews or renounces one kind of plenty for another (a rich lack), the novella is concerned with the superfluosness of speculative story-telling and interpretation. Lacking the historical backdrop of a novel event – the indispensable component of the novella according to Goethe – such as the plague, Tieck's Biedermeier story creates its own: a "sonderbarer Tumult" that attracts not only the attention of the police but also invites the speculative rumors of an onlooking crowd. These onlookers gather around the suburban home in which the event takes place and tell their own stories about a political dissident or rebel, an atheist intending to abolish Christianity, a stunning show-down between police and criminal that ends in canon-fire, bloodshed, and an execution, of

⁷⁸ Giovanni Boccaccio, *Decameron of Boccaccio*, 2. The Italian original uses the word "superfluità."

a brewing revolution that threatens to engulf Europe in flames. Their frivolous, extravagant speculations are the result of Romantic chit-chat (to use Derrida's term) which, as the narrator remarks, gives "das Gewöhnliche die Farbe der Fabel". Locating the wondrous or fable-like in the prosaic constitutes the central poetic principle of Tieck's novellas. Naming this principle as the problem the novella will address, *Des Lebens Überfluss* will have to do what the police of the time would be charged with doing, namely separating this frivolous surplus from the kind of necessary surplus it wants to find in prose. The economic domain of *Überfluss* extends to the police as the body responsible for preventing a "Tumult" of speech, the inflationary, speculative, indeed frivolous account of events that dot the beginning and end of the novella. This is why when the protagonist is cornered by the police at the end of the novella, he resorts to inflationary narration countering attempts to force him out of the apartment through starvation by exclaiming "weit gefehlt! [. . .] auf Monate sind wir mit getrocknetem Obst, Pflaumen, Birnen, Äpfeln und Schiffszwieback versehen [. . .] und sollte es an Holz gebrechen so [. . .] finden sich alte Türen, überflüssige Dielen, selbst vom Dachstuhle kann gewiß manches als entbehrlich losgebrochen werden" (244). To this the police reply: "Er ist Demagog und Carbonari [. . .] das hört man nun wohl an seinen Reden" (244). The strategy of the police will lie in countering this exaggerative, overflow of speech.

At the same time the police, with their own inflationary speech, generate the novella in the first place: when the police chief describes Heinrich's poetic act (destroying the staircase, a destruction of property) as "über die Beispiele" (244), he gives the event its poetic splendor as an 'unheard-of' violation of order, something truly extravagant. It is, in fact, the novella's narrator who at the story's beginning takes a different route and reduces the frivolous chit-chat to the necessary 'facts:' "So viel war ausgemacht, in einem kleinen Hause hatte es Tumult gegeben [. . .]

.]” or “So viel ist gewiß, dieser unbekannte Mann lebte sehr still [. . .]” (194). Thus begins the story, which immediately turns this poetic regulation of extravagance (rumor) into a reduction of the material kind: sheer poverty: “[. . .] jetzt sind, so scheint es, alle Mittel erschöpft? Gewiß, Heinrich [. . .].” What is certain is the exhaustion of means.

Tieck’s plot takes two of the central tropes of the novella, as he sees it, namely the marvelous or “Wunderbare” and the inversion or turn, the “Wendepunkt” – in the dramatic sense of peripeteia – and injects them into the economy of prose.

Eine Begebenheit sollte anders vorgetragen werden, als eine Erzählung; diese sich von Geschichte unterscheiden, und die Novelle nach jenen Mustern sich dadurch aus allen andern Aufgaben hervorheben, daß sie einen großen oder kleinern Vorfall in's hellste Licht stelle, der, so leicht er sich ereignen kann, doch wunderbar, vielleicht einzig ist. Diese Wendung der Geschichte, dieser Punkt, von welchem aus sie sich unerwartet völlig umkehrt, und doch natürlich, dem Charakter und den Umständen angemessen, die Folge entwickelt, wird sich der Phantasie des Lesers um so fester einprägen, als die Sache, selbst im Wunderbaren, unter andern Umständen wieder alltäglich sein könnte.⁷⁹

Des Lebens Überfluss offers a specific transposition of this theory of the novella into the economy of prose. The wondrous is now the *Wirtschaftswunder* of the surprising, prolific capital, the return on investment, that ends *Des Lebens Überfluss*; the turn, in similar fashion, is this turn from lack to plenty. Indeed, one could say that in *Des Lebens Überfluss* the Romantic trope of the inverted world, a trope Tieck worked with extensively, is transposed onto the “Verkehr” of the social, which the lovers had hoped to separate themselves from (“völlig von allem Verkehr mit den Menschen abgeschnitten” [217]). In other words, the inverted order of the novella’s ending (in the turn from lack to plenty after lack wasn’t plentiful enough) – the *verkehrte Welt* or *ordo inversus* it announces – describes a social logic that, in many ways, lies at the heart of the ‘prose of relations’ in the bourgeois civil society of nineteenth-century industrial capitalism, namely the turn from insolvency to solvency.

⁷⁹ Tieck, *Schriften*, vol. 11 (Berlin: Reimer, 1829), lxxxvi.

This inverted world, a comedy of errors with an earnest economic subtext, that describes the intersection of a value problem of life and literature will become in the hands of Gottfried Keller a kind of conjuncture of fortune, a story of luck or *Glück* that will also operate according to an *Umschlag* from lack to plenty. But Keller will leave Tieck's anthropological Romanticism behind, Überfluss and Mangel will become credit and debt, the remainder will be a ledger that can't be balanced.

CHAPTER TWO

Schuldenverkehr: Conjunctures of Fortune in Keller

Transfiguration and Transvaluation

In few literary texts of the 19th century is the economy of prose and the problems it poses for *Poesie* (in the sense described in the previous chapter) as prominent as in Gottfried Keller's novella cycle *Die Leute von Seldwyla* (1853-1874).¹ Like Tieck who relinquishes the Romantic attempt to create an autarkic poetic world opposed to prose, searching instead for the poetic within the prosaic (for instance in the guise of a *Wirtschaftswunder*), Keller locates the poetic this side of the prosaic world. Whereas Tieck's *Des Lebens Überfluß* only gestures in this direction (for instance with the return on capital from India), Keller's prosaic world has fully arrived in the nexus of global capitalist trade. Where to locate the value of literature in this world will be one of the central questions Keller addresses in *Seldwyla*, turning it into a literary question. Scenes like the following demonstrate how this "Handelswelt" irrupts at the center of his narratives, a scene that with its complex concatenations and metonymic chains deserves full citation.

[...] es brach eine jener grimmigen Krisen von jenseits des Ozeanes über die ganze Handelswelt herein und erschütterte auch das Glorsche Haus, welches so fest zu stehen schien, mit so plötzlicher Wut, daß es beinahe vernichtet wurde und nur mit großer Not stehen blieb. Schlag auf Schlag fielen die Unglücksberichte innerhalb weniger Wochen und machten den stolzen Menschen und die Nächte schlaflos, den Morgen zum Schrecken und die langen Tage zur unausgesetzten Prüfung. Große Warenmassen lagen jenseits der Meere entwertet, alle Forderungen waren so gut wie verloren und das angesammelte Vermögen schwand von Stunde zu Stunde mit den hochprozentigen Papieren, in welchen es angelegt war, so daß zuletzt nur noch der Grundbesitz und

¹ The exception may be Keller's own *Der Grüne Heinrich* (1854), written at the same time as *Seldwyla*. On the economy of *Der grüne Heinrich* see Jochen Hörisch. *Kopf oder Zahl*.

einiges in alten Landestiteln bestehendes Stammvermöge vorhanden war. Aber auch dieses sollte dahingeopfert werden, um die eigenen Verbindlichkeiten zu erfüllen, welche im Augenblicke des Sturmes bei dem großen Verkehre gerade bestanden.

Die Männer rechneten und sprachen miteinander bleich und still Tage und Nächte lang, und die Hausordnung schien erstarrt zu sein. Die Dienstboten arbeiteten ohne Befehl und bereiteten das Essen, aber niemand aß oder wußte, was er aß. Die Uhren liefen ab und wurden kummervoll aufgezogen, nachdem sie tagelang still gestanden. Die Zeit mußte dann zusammengesucht werden, wie man in der Finsterniß ein Lichtlein am andern anzündet, um sehen zu können. Einige junge Kätzchen, welche bis zum Tage des Unglücks der Zeitvertreib und das Spiel von alt und jung gewesen waren, wurden plötzlich gar nicht mehr gesehen und zogen sich mit ihren kleinen Sprüngen in einen Winkel zurück, und als nach geraumer Zeit einige Seelenruhe wieder in das Haus gekommen war, wunderten sich alle, daß die Katzen unter ihren Augen auf einmal groß geworden seien.

Als es hieß, daß, wenn die Ehre des Hauses gerettet und alle Schulden bezahlt sein werden, nicht eines Talers Wert mehr im Besitze der Familie bleibe und sie, gänzlich verarmt, von neuem anfangen müßten, stand die Frau Gertrud, die Stauffacherin, und schlotterte an ihrem ganzen Leibe; sie mußte niedersitzen.²

While nearly all of Keller's *Seldwyla* stories thematize the encroachment of a burgeoning global capitalist economy on the 'traditional' economic order of the family household, this scene is particular in its detailed unfurling of a "Hausordnung" upset by global crisis.³ Invoking the metaphors of a natural disaster, this passage documents a spectacle of financial deflation, of *Entwertung*, that knows no bounds: metonymically unrolling its force from the macro ("die ganze Handelswelt") to the micro scale ("das Glorsche Haus"), the "Handelskrise" not only eviscerates the family fortune in its wake but upsets all indices of normality, from the family pet to the course of time; a phenomenology of crisis *in nuce*. Yet Keller's description of economic crisis thwarts the anormality and suddenness of the event (its "plötzliche Wut"), its status as a singular incident, in the very moment of its positing. Like A.W. Schlegel's suggestion that the

² Gottfried Keller, *Die Leute von Seldwyla* (Frankfurt am Main: Insel, 1987), 589-590. All citations from this edition.

³ In many ways, Keller's *Seldwyla* offers a fictional account of what Max Weber will describe in chapter 2 of *Die Protestantische Ethik und der 'Geist' des Kapitalismus* as the rationalization of the traditionalist ethos of the "Verleger" (52). Not incidentally, Weber's example is, like in Keller's *Kleider machen Leute*, the textile industry.

novella negotiate between the *immerfort* and the *einmal* of world events, or Lukács' call to counter 'screaming contingency' in the novella with objective commentary, Keller's crisis dramatizes an event that violently upsets the everyday at the same time as it integrates it into the everyday: time, brought to a standstill, is restored; the cats, whose disappearance was first portending now return to reassert a natural and uninterrupted temporality of growth; and, in the very moment of naming the event, the crisis is subsumed in a series of recurring events, as one of many, "eine jener." What Walter Benjamin, in an essay on Keller,⁴ describes as Keller's epic heritage is at work in this move from global economic crisis to a cat, a condensation of world-historical event with the Romantic *Volksmärchen* trope *par excellence*, and in the shudder that moves from the family "Haus" to Frau Gertrud.⁵ Such poetic moves, as part of what Benjamin calls Keller's "Gesetzt der Schrumpfung," would, in this context, hardly seem to be transfigurative in the sense typically associated with poetic realism, which, in Fontane's words neither consists in "das nackte Wiedergeben des alltäglichen Lebens, am wenigstens seines Elends [. . .]" nor should be confused with "Misere,"⁶ and which aims, as Keller writes, "in der gemeinen Wirklichkeit eine schönere Welt wiederherzustellen."⁷ In this context, the charge against Keller as guilty of a naïve transfiguration of social reality deserves revisiting.

Transfiguration in Keller, this chapter argues, is not an aestheticizing compensation for but a skeptical encounter with economic misère, one that pivots on an understanding of transfiguration as transvaluation, which names, in its broadest sense, a reappraisal of a dominant value system (in Keller's case, economically, credit and debt) and an account of the reality of a given value

⁴ Walter Benjamin, "Gottfried Keller" in *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 2, bk. 1, 283-294.

⁵ See *Spiegel, das Kätzchen* as Keller's reply to Romanticism's cats, including Tieck's *Gestiefelter Kater*.

⁶ Theodore Fontane, "Unsere lyrische und epische Poesie seit 1848" in *Die deutsche Literatur in Text und Darstellung: Bürgerlicher Realismus*, 56.

⁷ Keller, *Historisch-Kritische Gottfried-Keller-Ausgabe*, 15:83.

system as the result of technical, material, and social procedures.

Unlike in Tieck, the poetic in Keller is no longer to be had as a *violation* of bourgeois prosaic order – in the form of the *Eigentumsdelikt*.⁸ Rather Keller insists on it, this side of the law, as a “right.” As he famously writes to Paul Heyse in 1881, what Keller, in the bureaucratic language of the *Stadtschreiber*, calls the “Reichsunmittelbarkeit der Poesie” consists in “das Recht, zu jeder Zeit, auch im Zeitalter des Fracks und der Eisenbahnen, an das Parabelhafte, das Fabelmäßige ohne weiteres anzuknüpfen, ein Recht, das man sich nach meiner Meinung durch keine Culturwandlung nehmen lassen soll.”⁹ Keller’s right to the poetic is typically read as one of the central programmatic statements of poetic realism, an insistence on the transfigurative force of a realist literature in a post-idealist context. The right to the fable-like in the era of the locomotive opens up, however, a kind of discrepancy or gap in the contemporary *Alltag* of an epoch and the poetic representation of this *Alltag* that is more than simply the gap of the poetic as transfigurative.¹⁰ What Keller claims “without qualification [*ohne weiteres*]” is the right to an immediate connection, or literally a ‘tying to’ something, that in its very articulation establishes the non-immediacy of the fable-like or poetic and the contemporary “Zeitalter.” The right to an immediate connection to the poetic in an age in which this connection is no longer given *de facto* prompts Keller’s attempt to recuperate a loss *de jure* as it were, a recuperation that cannot help

⁸ As this chapter’s analysis of Keller’s novella *Kleider machen Leute* will show, violation of the law is structurally impossible or always already rectified in a Kellerian “Rechtsordnung” in which, as Benjamin suggests, verdict and clemency converge. This isn’t to say, however, that the scales of justice are balanced, the quid-pro-quo order of right in Keller’s non-bourgeois ‘Rechtsordnung’ of payback/revenge always leaves a remainder.

⁹ Gottfried Keller to Paul Heyse, July 27, 1881, in *Gesammelte Briefe*, vol. 3, bk. 1, 57.

¹⁰ See Preisendanz: “Verklärung meint [. . .] eine Schreibweise, die den Unterschied zwischen dem vom Leben gestellten Bilde und dem dichterischen Gebilde nicht verwischt, sondern verbürgt, eine Schreibweise, in der Darstellung mehr als Nachbildung oder Bestandsaufnahme, in der sie Grund und Ursprung einer Wirklichkeit ist” (*Wege des Realismus*, 83). In this regard, Realism’s transfiguration aims to valorize the prosaic world in a way that is not simply an effusive aestheticization of reality but value-productive and original in its own right.

but *ex negativo* declare the current age – and with it prosaic reality – to be poetically insolvent. Perhaps more than transfigurative – indeed Keller’s novellas tend to turn towards rather than away from Fontane’s *misère* – Keller’s claim to a poetic right is a recuperative gesture [“wiederherzustellen”]. In this regard, it depends on a loss or lack it seeks to restore by borrowing from the fables of the past; this will be explicit in the second preface to Keller’s *Seldwyla* collection when he describes his narrative project as a “Nachernte” (297). But even before then, as I’ll discuss below, Keller’s narration relies on a logic of a ‘fall’ out of paradise, and a recuperation of what is excised, expended, banished or wasted that makes the “Reichsunmittelbarkeit der Poesie,” more than a poetics of *Verklärung*, a poetics of *Verwertung*. This chapter examines this *Verwertung* in particular in its economic inflections in Keller’s *Seldwyla*; its poetics finds expression in the trope of insolvency or bankruptcy and in particular in what Keller in the preface to *Die Leute von Seldwyla* calls *Schuldenverkehr*. Affixing two master terms of nineteenth-century political economy (*Schulden* and *Verkehr*), Keller forms a compound that can be read as the central concept of his recuperative poetics. Transfiguration, by this logic, is not the ideological move *par excellence* but a realist one: out of the prosaic reality of credit/debt relations it excavates the material for a *Verwertung*. As Adolf Muschg has suggested for Keller’s Bildungsroman *Der grüne Heinrich* (1855) in a study of Keller’s work organized entirely around the trope of debt, Keller’s “Kunst-Sprache” stands under the “Imperativ ökonomischer Legitimation [. . .] so sehr, daß eher die ästhetische Lösung (das ‘Gleichgewicht’) mißglückt, als daß der Bund mit jener Grundverpflichtung gelockert würde.”¹¹ In this regard, this chapter looks specifically at Walser’s version of the story of fortune, the *Glücksgeschichte* in the context of this specific credit/debt logic of transfiguration. Central to this

¹¹ Adolf Muschg, *Gottfried Keller*, 95.

discussion will be how the two seminal thinkers of value in Keller's time address the problem of credit and debt: Nietzsche and Marx.

The Fall of the Debtor

In *Die Leute von Seldwyla* Keller embeds his stories within complex economies of credit and debt, solvency and insolvency, proprietary and non-proprietary wealth, speculation and financial risk. Seldwyla's strange economy as a "Paradies des Kredites" plays a decisive role in nearly all of the novellas, asserting more and less pressure on the narrative economies of the novellas.¹² Signs and motifs of this economy, such as the "Gültbrief von siebenhundert Gulden" that belongs to Züs Bünzlin (215), a central love interest of the three comb-makers in *Die drei gerechten Kammacher*, can hardly be read as "scandalous notation" or markers of "narrative luxury" like Flaubert's barometer, and their persistent presence cannot be reduced to the production of a reality effect.¹³ Züs Bünzlin's *Gültbrief*, a type of promissory or mortgage note, does not fall out of the "order of the *notable*," to return as a signifier of the real in a Barthesian textual economy,¹⁴ but becomes the dominant force of the novella's narrative and descriptive energies, drawing in and condensing a complex network of signifiers in a poetic technique Benjamin recognized as Keller's "Gesetz der Schrumpfung"¹⁵ at the same time that it instigates a proliferating chain of enumerations.¹⁶ In this novella as in the other Seldwyla novellas,

¹² Keller, *Die Leute von Seldwyla*, 10.

¹³ Roland Barthes, "The Reality Effect," 141.

¹⁴ Barthes' reality effect depends upon the economic metaphor since it results from "notations [. . .] [that] seem to correspond to a kind of narrative *luxury*, lavish to the point of offering many 'futile' details and thereby increasing the cost of narrative information." Barthes, 141.

¹⁵ Benjamin, "Gottfried Keller," 289.

¹⁶ Rainer Nägele has elucidated this aspect of Keller's prose. Nägele refers to a "knotting of signifiers" in Keller's baroque and "conspicuously regular catalog-like enumerations," including a list of toiletry and other items given to the tailor of *Kleider machen Leute*. Nägele describes the strange amalgamation of

instruments of value and other economic motifs become nodal points of organization for the larger narrative economy of the novella. As part of what Benjamin calls the “Durchdringung des Erzählerlichen und Dichterischen” in Keller, these signs of value become poetological principles for the order of narration in Keller’s novellas: beyond their poetic-semiotic function, they generate narrative threads, possible events, and logics of concatenation of their own.¹⁷

Economic assets, figures of value, and relations of value thus circulate in Keller’s novellas on and below the surface of the text and operate on more than simply a thematic level. They become, furthermore, ordering principles of the text that yoke together various narrative threads in a way that exceeds their status as referents to Keller’s contemporary epoch.¹⁸ Züs Bünzlin’s *Gültbrief* is an instrument of value that has a specific economic-juridical history: *Gültbriefe* function in rural economies of Germany in Switzerland up to the 19th century as bonds, formalized instruments of value used in informal credit economies to note an outstanding debt or obligation, and often used as mortgages on property.¹⁹ But in the unusual economy of *Die drei gerechten Kammacher*, Züs Bünzlin’s *Gültbrief* writes its own history, generating

baroque- and nineteenth-century poetic realism in Keller as a non-psychologizing and radically exogenous version of “eccentric realism,” one that frustrates a topography of surface and depth. “If on the one hand Keller’s stories are overarched by adages and sayings from the realm of old experiences, they are also undermined and enclosed by strange, not easily describable cellar vaults [. . .] which allow Keller’s language and style to resonate.” Rainer Nägele, “Keller’s Cellar Vaults: Intrusions of the Real in Gottfried Keller’s Realism,” 191-192.

¹⁷ This relation between detail and the whole of the text has often been noted in Keller and is central to his narrative economy. Menninghaus, for this reason, calls Keller a guardian of the “kanonischen Eigenwert der Sinnlichkeit” and an artist “dessen Schrift noch das winzigste Detail aus einer sich selbst genügenden Realie in die Funktion einer streng durchbildeten Textualität verwandelt.” See Winfried Menninghaus, *Artistische Schrift*, 9.

¹⁸ This, too, is therefore one of the ways in which Keller’s prose is both ancient and modern at once, as Benjamin suggests: “[Keller] glaubte seine Zeit zu geben und in ihr gab er Antike” (Benjamin, 289). Many of Keller’s imports from his contemporary economic world tend, like Odysseus’ scar in Homer, to take on epic dimensions. A more detailed analysis of Keller’s realism and what Auerbach sees as the ‘realism’ of Homer’s *Odyssey* could pursue this ‘ancient’ quality of Keller’s writing from a different angle. See chapter one of Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*.

¹⁹ See Sheilagh Ogilvie, Markus Küpker, and Jennie Maegraith, “Household Debt in Early Modern Germany: Evidence from Personal Inventories.”

“schlimme Geschichten” as it becomes the “Perpetuum mobile” of the story and the primary source of narrative conflict for the three righteous combmakers who struggle against each other to woo the bearer of the bond. If the “Gültbrief von siebenhundert Gulden” performs, as Nägele suggests, a semantic condensation of terms related to validity and currency (*gelten, gültig, Gold, Geld*, etc.), it also becomes a literal bond for the novella’s characters: both in the form of an oppressive “eheliche Verbindung” for the Schwabian combmaker that ultimately marries Züs Bünzlin to procure the funds necessary to buy out his master’s workshop, and in the form of the caustic constellation of the three combmakers; the mortgage bond ties their fates together and ultimately leads to the demise of all three (one hangs himself from a tree, the other goes mad and becomes an antisocial hermit, and the third enters an ‘oppressive’ marriage).²⁰

In the fictional world of Keller’s *Seldwyla*, poetic signs are embedded in an economy of prose in which anything can become a bond, an instrument of value, can be capitalized upon, fall into bankruptcy, or proliferate endlessly, like the promissory note of *Die drei gerechten Kammacher* or the stones from a quarry that become the basis for a “Schuldenwesen” in *Frau Regel Amrain und ihr Jüngster*. The prefaces to the two parts of *Die Leute von Seldwyla*, which introduce an entire repertoire of economic motifs that will circulate in the novellas that follow, rewrite a tradition of the literary idyll to present a fictional Swiss village that is hardly a *locus amoenus* – as the etymology of its name might suggest – but which is mired in precarious and paradoxical relations of value, a town in which “die Gemeinde reich ist und die Bürgerschaft arm” and “kein Mensch . . . etwas [hat] und niemand weiß, wovon sie seit Jahrhunderten eigentlich leben” (9). The good life in *Seldwyla* (“sie [the Seldwyler residents] leben sehr lustig

²⁰ Keller’s novella partakes in a literary history of tragic outcomes instigated by a bond or mortgage note. See, for instance, Marc Shell’s reading of the mortgage in *Faust II* in chapter 4 of *Money, Language, Thought*.

und guter Dinge”) is a sham, which is to say it rests on “zerknitterten Schuldscheinen” (296).

Seldwyla is a “Paradies des Kredits” that doesn’t last, in which “seltsamen Geschichten und Lebensläufen” rise and fall with the fluctuations of its volatile economy of credit and debt and wherein the good life lapses into insolvency and exile from the paradise of credit:

Der Kern und der Glanz des Volkes besteht aus den jungen Leuten von etwa zwanzig bis fünf-, sechsunddreißig Jahren, und diese sind es, welche den Ton angeben . . . sie lassen solange es geht, fremde Leute für sich arbeiten und benutzen ihre Profession zur Betreibung eines trefflichen Schuldenverkehrs, der eben die Grundlage der Macht, Herrlichkeit und Gemütlichkeit der Herren von Seldwyla bildet und mit einer ausgezeichneten Gegenseitigkeit und Verständnisinnigkeit gewährt wird; aber wohlgemerkt, nur unter dieser Aristokratie der Jugend. Denn sowie einer die Grenze der besagten blühenden Jahre erreicht . . . so ist er in Seldwyla fertig, er muß fallen lassen” (9-10)

Keller’s Seldwyla intertwines values of *Sittlichkeit*, moral values, with economic ones in an economy of credit and debt that is ‘backed’ by reciprocity and mutuality but that ends in a fall: in bankruptcy (“fallen”), and depletion as the debtors are banished from paradise as “Entkräfter” that reside “ferner am Orte” or are exiled to various corners of the globe (one might encounter Seldwylers in “Australien” “Kalifornien” “Texas” “Paris” or “Konstantinopel”).

Here as elsewhere Keller’s language opens onto what Benjamin names as a “‘bedenkliches’ Grotten und Höhlensystem” in Keller’s work, in which the “Rhythmik des bürgerlichen Stimmen- und Meinungs lärms” becomes entangled [“*verschränkt*”]²¹ with and ultimately repressed [“*verdrängt*”] by the “kosmischen Rhythmen” that accumulate “im Innern der Erde.” Like the global economic crisis in *Das verlorene Lachen*, cited at the opening of this chapter, that threatens to upset cycles of time altogether, what belongs squarely within the realm

²¹ In another context, Peter Fenves has addressed the role of *Verschränkung* in Benjamin’s conception of the work of art, unearthing entanglements between Benjamin, Heidegger and Schrödinger. Fenves’ work has as of yet, as far as I am aware, not been published. Fenves presented these ideas in a talk entitled “Temporary Entanglements Around 1935: Benjamin, Heidegger, Schrödinger” at the conference *Jetzt: Contemporary and Historical Figurations* at Cornell University, 31 Mar 2012.

of bourgeois prosaic reality (a “Handelskrise” a “Falliment”) quickly takes on cosmic dimensions. This move is, however, not without humor in Keller. As Benjamin suggests, the depths of the grotto and cave system figure Keller’s humor precisely not as a transfigurative ‘polishing of the surface’ [“Politur der Oberfläche”] but as a “Rechtsordnung” in its own right. The ‘order of right’ that Benjamin identifies in Keller’s humor is, indeed, everywhere in his Seldwyla stories;²² one could call it, in a spin on Keller’s right to the poetic, an ‘order of poetic justice’ in which Keller not only claims the right to the poetic but in which the poetic brings with it its own right: this is a right that cannot be separated from the notion of comeuppance or payback that poetic justice implies. This is a world, as Benjamin describes it, of non-sentencing enforcement [“urteilslose Vollstreckung”] in which verdict and clemency converge.²³ The *Schuldenverkehr* of Seldwyla and the bankruptcies, insolvencies, or falls, it entails – which, as in the case of Keller’s protagonist in *Kleider machen Leute*, often unfold in a humorous manner²⁴ –

²² For a different take on the relation between law and literature in Keller’s *Die Leute von Seldwyla* and a different sense of poetic right(s) see Eva Geulen, “Habe und Bleibe in Kellers ‘Romeo und Julia auf dem Dorfe.’”

²³ *Kleider machen Leute* is a prime example of how “Gnade” and “Verdikt” ‘humorously’ converge as a kind of poetic justice. After Keller’s protagonist is exposed as an imposter, the moment of judgment never occurs – the false count cannot be found guilty since he never actively posed as someone he wasn’t, signing all documents with his actual name. Friedrich Theodor Vischer reads the story this way as well: “der gute Schneidergeselle Strapinsky [sic!], der für entschuld bare Schuld vom Schicksal, das ihm die Falle doch selbst gelegt, so herb gezüchtigt und dann so hoch begnadigt wird.” Friedrich Theodor Vischer, *Allgemeine Zeitung*, July 22, 1874.

²⁴ If as Preisendanz has shown, Keller’s humor has less to do with a tension between appearance and reality, as is often suggested in the scholarship, and rests instead on an “eigenartigen Dualismus von absolutem und spezifischem Gewicht des geschilderten Details” that links the “erhabene kosmische Ordnung mit der banalsten, prosaischen Ordnung menschlichen Daseins,” then the humorous valences Keller gives to insolvency in the preface – humorous because they stretch from a ‘banal’ law of value in the literal sense of falling out of an economy of exchange to a cosmic law of the Fall for which the price is expulsion from a paradise of credit into an economy of *Schuld* – can be understood as part of a narrative adjudication of value that aligns the quotidian with the cosmic. This is one way in which Keller’s text develop their own economy of humor: when the relation between the day-in, day-out attempts to scrape by (the prosaic) turn over into a cosmic deprivation (“Entbehrung”). See Preisendanz’s reading of one such scene in *Pankraz, der Schmoller*, in which punctual signs of economic lack – the green bottom of the butter pot – take on cosmic dimensions. In that scene, the bottom of the butter pot indicates not only a lack of food that results from a meager “Witwengehalt” that is never paid on time but

bring these earthly cosmic depths to bear on and ultimately unravel a prosaic, bourgeois order of right as Keller becomes the arbiter, and author, of (narrative) motivation and culpability: in the singular, Kellerian *Rechtsordnung* of Seldwyla's economy, guilt and debt is attributed and forgiven and sometimes struck from the record entirely – as is the case in *Die drei gerechten Kammacher* which envisions an order of right [*“blutlose Gerechtigkeit”*] in which debt is erased from the Lord's Prayer: the sentence 'forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors' is “gestrichen” since this righteous order “keine Schulden macht und auch keine ausstehen hat” (203). Seldwyla's *Schuldenverkehr* paradoxically enforces a verdict that is never given or never given rightly: victims and perpetrators switch roles, comeuppance is experienced by the wrong people, justice is served and payback is had but neither in the proper terms of bourgeois/civil right nor in the terms of divine right, according neither to natural nor positive law but which, as an order of poetic justice, can only be realized within the specific narrative economy and economic logic of the Seldwyla novellas.²⁵ In affixing a master signifier of the 19th century to a term with religious, moral, and economic valences,²⁶ Keller's *Schuldenverkehr* transposes the

also a “regelmäßige jährliche Erscheinung, wie irgendeine am Himmel.” Preisendanz, *Humor als dichterische Einbildungskraft*, 153-154.

²⁵ Elsewhere, Benjamin locates *Schuldenverkehr* as part of the religious structure of capitalism in its dual meaning of debt and guilt: “Der Kapitalismus ist vermutlich der erste Fall eines nicht entschuldigenden, sondern verschuldeten Kultus” that universalizes guilt/debt until ultimately God himself becomes guilty. Benjamin, “Kapitalismus als Religion,” in *Gesammelte Schriften*, 6:100. Werner Hamacher recognizes in Benjamin's fragment an “etiological structure of time and history” (83) in the sense of *aition* as both provenance/cause and guilt: “Capitalism is thus essentially etiology, the attribution of provenance and guilt [. . .] Capitalism is a system for the attribution of guilt as well as debt” that posits and structures an essential lack like Christianity does (86-87). In Benjamin's words, capitalism like religion responds to and attempts to alleviate the same “Sorgen, Qualen, Unruhen” as does religion. For Hamacher, this means that as a cult religion, capitalism condemns to guilt by positing guilt/debt as the reason for a lack, the “‘worries, torments, and restlessness’ of natural life.” Hamacher, “Guilt History: Benjamin's Sketch ‘Capitalism as Religion.’”

²⁶ *Verkehr* is central to discourses in political economy in the 19th century. As Keith Tribe writes, “indeed, if one were to identify a specifically German trait in economic writing in mid-century, it would [be] [. . .] this universally accepted conception that the point of departure for the consideration of economic life was the human being and its needs. The existence of such human needs and wants generated a realm of

prosaic economy of Seldwyla into narratives of solvency and insolvency that cut across economic, juridical, and cosmic orders. Insolvency (“fallen lassen” in the words of the preface) means not only economic insolvency but entails the Fall out of the “Paradies des Kredits,” not only the inability to pay but metaphysical depletion (“entkräftet,” “fertig”) and the incurring of culpability/debt (*Schuld*). Through this semantic network of what in *Kleider* will be called “Falliment” (insolvency), Keller’s preface unfolds a certain lawful regularity, the “unveränderlicher Kreislauf der Dinge” in Seldwyla, that maps the prosaic/quotidian onto the cosmic and vice versa.²⁷ And if, as Benjamin suggests, the system of grottoes and caverns in Keller’s work, its system of humor, brings with it a Kellersque “Rechtsordnung,” then the adjudication of this order – operating through Keller’s humor as Benjamin sees it – becomes part of the narrative project in *Die Leute von Seldwyla*, a project that lies at least in part in how the ‘circulation’ of Seldwyla’s economy produces not goods but narrative fates, debts and credits, fortunes, and forfeitures, that is, in how its stories attribute credit and debt, fault and agency,

economic activity in which these needs were satisfied. The exchanges that occurred in this realm were summarised in the all-embracing topos of Verkehr—communication, commerce, social intercourse, traffic, exchange. Economic man was here conceived as der verkehrende Mensch. Verkehr is the axiom that unites studies of telegraphs, railways, stock exchanges, banks, and trade with a conception of the marketplace as a location at which the activities of individuals transmuted into an ordered economic whole.” Tribe, *Strategies of Economic Order: German Economic Discourse, 1750-1950*, 72-73.

²⁷ Keller’s “Kreislauf der Dinge” has then little to do with the physiological figure of circulation in economic thought that dominates 18th century political economy. Circulation in that sense implies the balance or equilibrium of a zero-sum game. Keller’s “Kreislauf” can never quite be balanced, or, if it could be, it would no longer serve as a poetic principle of narration. See sections 1 and 2 of chapter 4 in Vogl, *Kalkül und Leidenschaft*. But “Kreislauf” in Keller does have much to do with Marx. In his analysis of a different economic “Kreislauf” – namely that of capital accumulation – Marx offers his own story of an “ökonomischen Sündenfall,” that, as an “Anekdote der Vergangenheit,” plays a similar role as the “Sündenfall in der Theologie.” In the sphere of political economy, the economic Fall explains not how man became condemned to labor for his bread but “wieso es Leute gibt, die das keineswegs nötig haben,” that is, it offers an origin myth of accumulation that condemns some and pardons others: “So kam es, daß die ersten Reichtum akkumulierten und die letzteren schließlich nichts zu verkaufen hatten als ihre eigne Haut. Und von diesem Sündenfall datiert die Armut der großen Masse, die immer noch, aller Arbeit zum Trotz, nichts zu verkaufen hat als sich selbst, und der Reichtum der wenigen, der fortwährend wächst, obgleich sie längst aufgehört haben zu arbeiten.” Karl Marx, *Das Kapital*, 741.

within the narratives of insolvency it tells. Keller's novellas instantiate an economy of *Schuldenverkehr* – they turn commerce in and of debt into the form of stories that often pivot on questions of payback, fault/guilt, unbalanced ledgers and broken contracts. *Schuldenverkehr* belongs therefore neither entirely to the prosaic order of bourgeois right nor the earthly cosmic order that Benjamin sees in Keller's work; it complicates, as Menninghaus points out, any symmetry between "Recht und Mythos" as a "Gleich um Gleich von Verletzung und Vergeltung, der Wiederkehr von Zeichen und Konstellation, der Macht eines Identitätsprinzips über alles einzelne."²⁸ Moreover, *Schuldenverkehr* in Keller's preface to *Seldwyla* takes the place of the Decameronian *brigata* or the conversational exchange of Tieck's *Phantastus* or Hoffmann's *Serapionsbrüder* as a communicative set-up for the novella cycle. What was previously a trafficking or exchange of storytellers is now one of debt, which will become the dominant narrative principle and 'frame' of the novellas to follow, a frame that doesn't quite fit, as will be discussed below. *Schuldenverkehr*, as Keller names this principle, not only concatenates the economic event with larger story logics, it acts as the order of right, the principle of Keller's unusual version of poetic justice that on semantic and narrative level links the inability to pay (insolvency, "Falliment") with death, forfeiture, or demise ("fertig," "zugrunde richten," "Verfall").²⁹ But the semantics of "fallen" – out of the paradise of credit into post-lapsarian debt

²⁸ Winfried Menninghaus, "Romeo und Julia auf dem Dorfe: Eine Interpretation im Anschluss an Walter Benjamin" in *Artistische Schrift*, 91-161, here 107.

²⁹ To offer some examples of how stories of *Schuldenverkehr* and insolvency abound in *Seldwyla*: The death of a husband in *Pankraz, der Schmoller* who is "schon lange fertig geworden" in the double-sense of bankrupt and 'down-and-out' leads to a meager "Witwengehalt" (); The piece of land that becomes the "Grundstein einer verworrenen Geschichte" in *Romeo und Julia*, triggering not only a legal battle that pits differing conceptions of proprietary rights against each other but also to an incredible loss of money (); The "Schuldenwesen" of *Frau Regel Amrain und ihr Jüngster*, with its "verpfändeten Steinlagern" "gründete zum erstenmal die Unternehmung, statt auf den Scheinverkehr, auf wirkliche Produktion" (); the economic crisis in *Das verlorenene Lachen* leads to the bankruptcy of the house; the tailor-cum-count of *Kleicher machen Leute* finds himself in the opening of the novella, after his master goes bankrupt ("Falliment"), without a dime, etc.

– also point to another crucial category of narrative motivation in Keller: “Zufall,” which Keller links to the emergence of financial speculation in Seldwyla in the second preface and a shift in the character of Seldwyla’s residents who now exhibit “das blinde Vertrauen auf den Zufall.” This category is not the “fall” into a *Schuldzusammenhang*, as it were; indeed it marks the break with the *Schuldenverkehr* of the first volume’s preface. *Zufall* in Keller is connected not only to a wheel of economic fortune, a “Glück” that falls into one’s place (*fällt einem zu*), as it were, as part of the lottery of life: like for the wife of Viggi Störteler in *Die Missbrauchten Liebesbriefe*, for whom “ein ziemliches Vermögen . . . von auswärts zugefallen war” (379). *Zufall* is also, as this chapter will demonstrate for *Kleider machen Leute*, a logic of conjuncture or “Fügung” as Keller will name it in *Kleider*, that even as it conjoins incurs debts.

Narrating waste

To reiterate: as part of what Benjamin calls the “Durchdringung des Erzählerlichen und Dichterischen” in Keller, signs of value like the promissory note (a symbol much like the *Falke* Paul Heyse identifies as the keystone of the genre),³⁰ patterns of insolvency, and instances of credit and debt take on poetological significance for the larger project of narration in *Seldwyla*. This project is itself inscribed in a law of value: Keller’s stories aim to narrate not simply the ‘falls’ of Seldwyla’s trafficking in credit and debt, but what falls out of Seldwyla’s ‘circulation’ altogether; what, as the waste or refuse of Seldwyla, has no value at all. In a further inflection of the “Fall” of the debtor, Keller calls it *Ab-fall*:

Doch nicht solche Geschichten, wie sei in dem beschriebenen Charakter von Seldwyla liegen, will ich eigentlich in diesem Büchlein erzählen, sondern einige sonderbare

³⁰ On Heyse’s *Falke* see Hannelore Schlaffer, *Poetik der Novelle*, 112-114. Schlaffer also suggests that such symbols in the novella operate as immanent “Agens der Handlung,” they “geh[en] aus dem Geschehen hervor und wirk[en] auf dieses zurück” (111).

Abfällsel, die so zwischendurch passiert, gewissermaßen ausnahmsweise, und doch auch gerade nur zu Seldwyla vor sich gehen konnten (13).

As “Abfällsel” or waste Keller’s novellas would seem to lack both the exemplary value of the type and the singular value of the case. They appear to fall outside the “Kreislauf der Dinge” in Seldwyla, and indeed out of the circular dialectic of a part-whole, particular-general relation by constituting an exception to Seldwyla’s exceptional character. Yet it is precisely their status as exceptions to the exception, occasional occurrences that happen in the interstices of the Seldwylian “Kreislauf” – the cycles of growing old, incurring debt, being forced into exile, or performing grueling work – that make these stories ones that could *only* occur in the exceptional town of Seldwyla. Their exemplarity, if one can call it that, rests not on their typicality (they don’t stand in for a larger rule or a whole) but on the fact that they fall through the cracks. If Seldwyla is a place of ‘falls’ in the multiple senses outlined here, there can be no archive, no paradigmatic collection of its various incidences. *Schuldenverkehr* requires a different poetics than the catalogue. The exceptional status of the subsequent stories is thus not relative to an established norm (there is no normalcy in Seldwyla with its “seltsamen Geschichten und Lebensläufen”) but second-order and for that reason does not dialectically result in the crystallization of a type, i.e. an exception that is also typical, but in waste. Yet as “Abfällsel” – and as part of the semantic constellation of the ‘Fall’ that characterizes Seldwyla’s *Schuldenverkehr* and paradise of credit – the subsequent stories do not actually stand outside Seldwyla’s “Kreislauf” but are embedded in the texture of the village’s daily life *as* its refuse, as extreme instances both part of and not part of Seldwyla’s larger story.³¹ It is only in their status

³¹ This is similar to how Andreas Gailus reads the novella in systems-theoretical terms: the radical exceptionalism of the novella and its focus on contingency as ‘environmental irritations’ that are assimilated by the system “and used as stimulus for the construction of its own complexity.” See Gailus, “Form and Chance,” 762.

as ‘sonderbare’ waste – that is, as the word suggests, waste that is unusual and for that reason extraordinary and deviant or able to be exceptionalized or discarded (i.e. in the sense of *ausgesondert*) – that these stories can in fact become exemplary (etymologically that which is taken out)³² of Seldwyla: they might be waste but they can *only* be Seldwyla’s waste.

Keller’s preface thus complexifies an understanding of the novella as the site for the integration of some exceptional event, promising a particularly complex model of narrative that does not ground its realist technique in the identity of generality and particularity, seeking the typical or exemplary in the particular, but absolutizes the exceptional as the refuse material of a given order. As Jörg Kreienbrock suggests in a reading of this scene, the “Abfällsel,” because they are worthless and can neither be exchanged nor used, upset a conventional ‘exchange’ between frame and novella and frustrate the interpretative effort altogether: “Es kommt zu keiner Akkumulation von Sinn im Falle der Novellen oder von Kapital im Falle der ‘fallierten’ Bankrotteure. [. . .] Muß nicht jeder Deutungsversuch damit rechnen, ‘fallen lassen’ zu müssen, und aus dem ‘Paradies des Kredits,’ in dem Werte und Worte identisch zu sein scheinen, herausfallen?”³³ If, then, hermeneutics, as a lending of credit, an investment in value and word, falls due or lapses with the paradoxical worthlessness of Keller’s *Abfällsel*, a *poetics* of waste would, in the spirit of Seldwyla’s economy, call for a *Verwertung* of waste, indeed it would call for turning refuse into assets, capitalizing on their status as ‘sonderbar.’

Keller’s narrative model of *Verwertung* points to a paradox in this regard: how can his novellas give narrative expression to stories *qua* refuse, allowing them to remain as remainders,

³² Agamben, however, sees the example as “neither particular nor universal” but rather as a “singular object [. . .] that *shows* its singularity.” Perhaps in this regard Keller’s “Abfällsel” could be called examples. See Giorgio Agamben, “Example” in *The Coming Community*, trans. Michael Hardt (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993).

³³ Jörg Kreienbrock, “Das Kreditparadies Seldwyla: Zur Beziehung von Ökonomie und Literatur in Gottfried Keller’s *Die Leute von Seldwyla*,” 121.

as ‘eccentricities’ (Rainer Nägele) that poses a crucial challenge to identity while complicating the realist novella’s orientation towards the norm?³⁴ How can these stories be recuperated, *verwertet*, as waste without being accumulated? To recall the “Reichsunmittelbarkeit der Poesie,” one could say the poetics of waste in Keller rests on a self-aware confrontation of the same difference that is at stake between the age of the locomotive and the fable-like. The act of an immediate “anknüpfen” to the fable-like brings the poetic into the contemporary as its *Abfall*, without eliding its difference. This difference now becomes legible as part of the credit/debt logic of *Seldwyla*. Debt, in this regard, is an uncanny phenomenon, difficult to identify, make visible, or detect, as Richard Dienst writes, because it “shows us a world in which nothing really belongs to itself.”³⁵ Keller’s *Abfällsel* in their paradoxical belonging in non-belonging share this structure with debt; Keller’s narrative of waste is thus about making visible or exposing the structure of debt as a structure that is everywhere and nowhere at once, as the refuse that is there but refuses to be seen.

Keller’s preface to the second volume of *Seldwyla*, published in 1874, demonstrates how intricately the credit/debt structure of *Seldwyla* is tied to the project of narration. Narrating *Abfällsel* shifts to a more historicist mode in the second preface which Keller calls “Nachernte,”

³⁴ Erika Swales has suggested an affinity between Keller’s “narrative modality” and Adorno’s negative dialectics, with its emphasis on non-identity, though Adorno’s few comments on Keller would suggest the critical theoretician sees this differently. See Erika Swales, *The Poetics of Scepticism*, 195. This model of narrative waste, as a certain kind of materialism, would need to be contextualized against the background of Keller’s reception of Feuerbach. On the relation between Feuerbach and Keller in the *Seldwyla* collection, see Bernd Neumann, “‘Ganzer Mensch’ und ‘innerweltliche Askese;’” see also Paul Fleming, “Der Schmer des Realismus: Der Körper in Kellers *Spiegel*, *das Kätzchen*.” Keller’s *Abfällsel* display a similarity to Lacan’s concept of *extimité* (extimacy), i.e. what is most intimate is also exterior; the foreign object/remainder (Real) at the heart of the libidinal economy. Something of the uncanny lingers in Keller’s *Abfällsel*.

³⁵ Richard Dienst, *The Bonds of Debt*, 119. In a twist on an argument that Dienst makes about the early Marx’s Romantic account of credit, Annie McClanahan discusses the uncanny dimension of debt and argues that Marx – like Freud a reader of Hoffmann – discovers specifically in the mortgaged property relation a kind of uncanny alienation. See chapter 3 of Annie McClanahan, *Dead Pledges: Debt, Crisis, and Twenty-First Century Culture*.

an effort to belatedly revive the “guten lustigen Tagen der Stadt” after a series of changes in Seldwyla threaten to elide its exceptional status so that it “sich nicht mehr von der braven übrigen Welt unterscheid[et]” (295). These shifts and the elision of difference they bring with them, the preface suggests, would mean that there are no more interesting stories to tell; the “Reichsunmittelbarkeit der Poesie” absorbed entirely by prosaic reality’s ever-sameness. “Aber eben durch alles das verändert sich das Wesen der Seldwyler; sie sehen [. . .] schon aus wie andere Leute; es ereignet sich nichts mehr unter ihnen was der beschaulichen Aufzeichnung würdig wäre” (297).

As a reflection, then, on what is worth being written down, the second preface clarifies the role of *Schuldenverkehr* in producing the waste that Keller will narrate. Things rapidly change in Seldwyla and they do so to the tune of the world economy: “Es ist insonderlich die überall verbreitete Spekulationsbetätigung in bekannten und unbekannten Werten, welche den Seldwylern ein Feld eröffnet hat, das für sie wie seit Urbeginn geschaffen schien und sie mit *einem* Schlage Tausenden von ernsthaften Geschäftsleuten gleichstellte” (296). The material organization of Seldwyla shifts from a local economy of debtors and creditors, of a few haves and a few have-nots, and of a dynamic exchange between idleness and industriousness, to a new structure of financial capitalism that provides the breeding ground for the villager’s innate speculative proclivities. In the second preface, the villager’s propensity towards idleness – the “Müßiggang” that, as the proverb in the first preface tells us is “aller Laster Anfang” (13)³⁶ – is recast as a suitable condition for their new economic activity, in terms literal and metaphoric at once: “Das gesellschaftliche Besprechen dieser Werte, das Herumspazieren zum Auftrieb eines

³⁶ On work and labor as a new variable of value at the beginning of the nineteenth century see Vogl, *Kalkül und Leidenschaft*, 335-346. For a study of *Müßiggang* and its consequences for aesthetics and literature, see Martin Jörg Schäfer, *Die Gewalt der Muße: Wechselverhältnisse von Arbeit, Nichtarbeit, Ästhetik*.

Geschäftes, mit welchem keiner weiteren Arbeit verbunden ist als das Erdulden mannigfacher Aufregung [. . .] sind so recht ihre Sache” (296). This “überall verbreitete Spekulationsbetätigung in bekannten und unbekannten Werten” becomes here a mode of economic activity that is decidedly non-laborious and seems to reap profit from simple chatter, strolling, and a bit of tenacity.³⁷ The economy of grueling, belated labor and indebtedness is replaced here by a speculative financial economy that ushers in a new order of things: “Statt der ehemaligen dicken Brieftasche mit zerknitterten Schuldscheinen . . . führen sie nun elegante kleine Notizbücher, in welchen die Aufträge in Aktien, Obligationen, Baumwolle oder Seide kurz notiert werden.” This tidying-up of the ledger books, as it were, which produces, as Mary Poovey suggests of double-entry bookkeeping, an “effect of accuracy,”³⁸ a semblance of precision, and an order in which nothing can fall through the cracks, marks an end, if not to the entire credit/debt structure, certainly to the specific character of *Schuldenverkehr* in Seldwyla:

Statt der früheren plebjisch-gemütlichen Konkurse und Verlumpungen, die sie untereinander abspielten, gibt es jetzt vornehme Akkommodements mit stattlichen auswärtigen Gläubigern, anständig besprochene Schicksalswendungen, welche annäherungsweise wie etwas Rechtes aussehen, sodann Wiederaufrichtungen, und nur selten muß noch einer vom Schauplatz abtreten (296).

This introduction of an elegant system of bookkeeping, with its outsourcing of the credit/debt relation and move away from the ‘plebian bankruptcies’ would seem to leave no space for the previous “falls” of the debtor; in the tidy bookkeeping of the new Seldwyla, there is no more room for stories as *Abfällsel*. Keller’s preface suggests a reason for this: the Seldwylans now

³⁷ Financial speculation, wherever, it shows up in Realism must be read in the context of a post-1848 rejection of philosophical speculation (i.e. Fontane’s remarks in “Unsere lyrische und epische Poesie seit 1848:” “die Welt ist des Spekulierens müde und verlangt nach jener ‘frischen grüne Weide,’ die so nah lag und doch so fern”). In Keller speculation returns but in the guise of finance capital – which as an economic motif will play a central role in Realism/Naturalism (Balzac, Zola, Frank Norris) on both sides of the Atlantic. See Adorno’s essay on Balzac, speculation, and realism, “Balzac Lektüre” in *Noten zur Literatur*.

³⁸ Mary Poovey, *A History of the Modern Fact*, 64.

display a “*blindes Vertrauen auf den Zufall*” (297). In this context, Keller’s *Kleider machen Leute* will be a response to this *Zufall*, one that pulls it back – in the logic of “*Nachernte*” – into the fall of debt by imagining it as contingency in its literal sense: the coming together or conjuncture of events, a conjuncture that in Keller incurs debt.

The “Fügung” of Fortune I (Kleider machen Leute)

Keller’s canonical novella *Kleider machen Leute*, published 1874 in the second volume of his novella cycle – and immediately following the second preface – serves in many ways as an illustration of poetics of transfiguration as one of *Verwertung*: as the adage of the title suggests, the story concerns the value of appearances and to what degree these might be a measure of value for one’s person. But Keller’s story can more properly be called a narrative of *Verwertung* because it tells a kind of ‘rags-to-riches’ story, exploring the vicissitudes of fortune – the meeting point or conjuncture of economic and cosmic providence – while raising questions about the credit and debt, assets and liabilities, fictional character incurs. Keller’s story of a poor, vagabond tailor’s rise to wealthy capitalist, structured around a comedy of mistaken identity, is not a frictionless tale of fortune, as the pervasive presence of the figure of *fortuna* might suggest. Instead, it reflects upon the junctures and conjunctures necessary to tell a story of fortune or *Glück*, as the narrator becomes an arbiter of textual order, seeking to smooth out the narrative trajectory through a constellation of “*Fügungen*” or contingencies that ultimately leave economic and narrative ledgers unbalanced.

Like many of the other *Seldwyla* novellas, fortune (economic and otherwise) in *Kleider*

becomes a question of fiction³⁹ as the text strives to find the proper narrative economy for a narrative of economic fortune (between the figure of *fortuna* and textual contingency). Fortune, in *Kleider*, is a precarious narrative, one haunted by the debts and remainders its narrative economy incurs and by the threat of falling due (becoming “fällig”) at any moment. The *Glücksgeschichte* in Keller is thus always already haunted by the uncanny incessantness of *Schuldenverkehr*. As Benjamin writes, Keller’s “Vision des Glücks” is inextricable from his skepsis.

Marx, Nietzsche, Keller

A bit more than a decade after the publication of the second volume of *Seldwyla*, which opens with *Kleider machen Leute*, Friedrich Nietzsche, an avid reader of Keller,⁴⁰ famously excavates a buried affinity between the moral concept of guilt (*Schuld*) and the “sehr materiellen

³⁹ Many of the Seldwyla novellas tie various forms of literary fiction and forms of writing to questions of economic and cosmic fortune. Often, Keller’s Seldwyla novellas raise the question of what genres are amenable to fortune: *Die missbrauchten Liebesbriefe* combines a fictional epistolary romance with bookkeeping and other notational forms of business. *Der Schmied seines Glückes* makes a family novel the fulcrum of economic *Glück* and when this ultimately fails fortune in life can only be had in a macabre/ironic realization of an adage/proverb. In this way the distinction that Frau Regel Amrain attempts to draw between the false value(s) at stake in the “Scheinverkehr” of “Schuldenwesen” and the real values of “wirkliche Produktion” (working “fleißig und ordentlich”) cannot be maintained since (fiction) *Schein* is always at stake.

⁴⁰ Nietzsche had become acquainted with Keller during his time in Zurich. The two corresponded in the 1880s and Nietzsche sent Keller some of his books including *Also sprach Zarathustra*. See the references to Keller and Nietzsche in Sander L. Gilman (ed.), *Begegnungen mit Nietzsche*. Nietzsche mentions Keller in the second volume of *Menschliches, Allzumenschliches* (1878) in terms of the value of prose. In an aphorism entitled “Der Schatz der deutschen Prosa,” Nietzsche evaluates the works of German prose literature. Besides the “best German book,” Goethe’s conversations with Eckermann, and all other texts of Goethe, Gottfried Keller’s *Die Leute von Seldwyla* is one of the few books (together with Lichtenberg’s aphorisms, the first volume of Johann Heinrich Jung-Stilling’s *Lebensgeschichte*, and Adalbert Stifter’s *Nachsommer*) that deserves to be read “wieder und wieder.” Nietzsche, *Menschliches, Allzumenschliches*, 599. On the theological-economic subtext of Jung-Stilling’s *Lebensgeschichte*, see Richard T. Gray, “Counting on God: Economic Providentialism in Johann Heinrich Jung-Stilling’s *Lebensgeschichte*” in *Money Matters*, 173-229.

Begriff" of debt (*Schulden*) in his *Genealogie der Moral* (1887).⁴¹ Nietzsche's genealogy of the sense of guilt rests on demonstrating how the infliction of punishment, with the equivalence it creates between "Schaden und Schmerz" (298), become an institutionalized social technology for the exercise of justice and the project of "breeding" [*heranzüchten*] an animal capable of making promises (291). Nietzsche's genealogy exhumes the asymmetric violence that underwrites human relations conventionally understood in terms of symmetry, reciprocity, and mutuality, a violence deeply embedded in the isomorphic emergence of the creditor-debtor relation together with the concept of a "Rechtssubjekt" (298). In referring an internalized human emotion (guilt, or bad conscience) back to the externalized forms of "Kauf, Tausch, Handel und Wandel," Nietzsche is hardly interested in a historical materialist historiography as it's formulated thirty years earlier in Marx and Engel's *German Ideology*. Nevertheless, Nietzsche's genealogy of *Schuld* shares with Marx's account of the emergence of capitalist value relations the attention to gore: the genealogy of morals exposes something like the primitive accumulation of pain that grounds human practices of memory, promising, etc., tracing how "alles Großen auf Erden" is written in blood: "gründlich und lange mit Blut begossen worden" (Nietzsche, 300).⁴²

Der Schuldner, um Vertrauen für sein Versprechen der Zurückbezahlung einzuflößen, um eine Bürgschaft für den Ernst und die Heiligkeit seines Versprechens zu geben, um bei sich selbst die Zurückbezahlung als Pflicht, Verpflichtung seinem Gewissen einzuschärfen, verpfändet Kraft eines Vertrags dem Gläubiger für den Fall, dass er nicht zahlt, Etwas, das er sonst noch „besitzt“, über das er sonst noch Gewalt hat, zum Beispiel seinen Leib oder sein Weib oder seine Freiheit oder auch sein Leben . . . Namentlich aber

⁴¹ Nietzsche, *Zur Genealogie der Moral*, 297.

⁴² Marx's chapters on primitive accumulation similarly attempt to show how capital comes to the world dripping from head to toe with blood ("von Kopf bis Zeh, aus allen Poren, blut- und schmutztriefend" [*Das Kapital*, 788]). Marx's analysis aims at different social forms than Nietzsche's but the two accounts might be more compatible than they appear at first glance: Marx shows how certain social groups are "hineingepeitscht, -gebrandmarkt, -gefoltert in eine dem System der Lohnarbeit notwendige Disziplin" (*Das Kapital*, 765), mechanisms similar to those that discipline the human as "berechenbar, regelmässig, notwendig" and thus enable a whole set of economic activities: "Preise machen, Werthe abmessen, Äquivalente ausdenken, tauschen" (Nietzsche, *Genealogie der Moral*, 306).

konnte der Gläubiger dem Leibe des Schuldners alle Arten Schmach und Folter anthun, zum Beispiel so viel davon herunterschneiden als der Grösse der Schuld angemessen schien: — und es gab frühzeitig und überall von diesem Gesichtspunkte aus genaue, zum Theil entsetzlich in's Kleine und Kleinste gehende Abschätzungen, zu Recht bestehende Abschätzungen der einzelnen Glieder und Körperstellen . . . Die Äquivalenz ist damit gegeben, dass an Stelle eines gegen den Schaden direkt aufkommenden Vortheils (also an Stelle eines Ausgleichs in Geld, Land, Besitz irgend welcher Art) dem Gläubiger eine Art Wohlgefühl als Rückzahlung und Ausgleich zugestanden wird (299).

What Nietzsche calls the “älteste und naivste Moral-Kanon der Gerechtigkeit” rest upon a violent interchange between creditor and debtor, as the foundational social relation, in which a promise to pay, credit, requires the collateral of living ‘property’ and compensation for forfeiture comes in the form of the pleasure taken in someone else’s pain (306). Law here functions to establish a standard of equivalence for a payback, to underwrite a moral economy that transacts in the singular currencies of pleasure and pain rather than a general equivalent (in money or commodity form). Moreover, the bond between creditor and debtor serves the disciplinary function of rendering human behavior “berechenbar, regelmässig, nothwendig” (292). Indeed, credit, for Nietzsche is a structure that establishes a relation between present and future, training man to be able in the present to account for the future, “für sich als Zukunft gut sagen zu können” in the form of the promise: “ich werde thun” (292). For this speech act to work, a regimentation of time is necessary that credit-debt relations fortify by coercively training character, indeed by creating character (*ethos*) through the disciplining of a subject over time, a subject that can in the present account for the future and indeed promise at all. The credit-debt relation is, in other words, not premised on moral values of reciprocity, mutuality, responsibility, etc., but produces these values in the first place through the “ungeheure Arbeit” of the “Sittlichkeit der Sitte” as a “soziale Zwangsjacke” (293). Credit-debt relations produce an ethical subjectivity along with an arsenal of social values steeped in material values and a schema of order that reduces contingencies of character to necessities of self-sameness/reliability. While

Nietzsche's account points to the many cultural emanations of the credit-debt relation, that range from spectacles of public punishment – a phenomenon that will later play a key role in Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* – to the tyranny of the state, to the entire *Schuldzusammenhang* of Christianity, its major feat lies in showing how the production of values through a materially motivated 'work on the self' generates a causal order of necessity/calculability that arises contingently. By excavating the "uncertain [*unsicher*]," "retroactive/belated [*nachträglich*]," "accidental [*accidentiell*]" history of ethical values (317), active in the spheres of law, economy, politics, etc., Nietzsche ruptures a semiology of value that would grasp something like guilt as a motivated sign of fault.

In an early and marginal collection of notes on James Mill (1844), Marx identifies a similar ethical-disciplinary structure at work in credit and debt, defining credit as the "*economic* judgment of the *morality* of a man."⁴³ Marx draws attention to how credit literalizes the character, status, and body of a man: "Credit no longer actualizes money-values in actual money but in human flesh and human hearts" (264).⁴⁴ In this way credit seems to generate a kind of value out of *ethos*. As Lazarrato writes, "The 'moral' concepts of good and bad, of trust and distrust, here translate into solvency and insolvency."⁴⁵ Significant, for the context of this argument about *Kleider machen Leute*, is the way in which the debtor in Marx's account

⁴³ Marx, "Comments on James Mill, *Éléments d'économie politique* Translated by J.T. Parisot, Paris 1823," 215. These notes have become canonical in certain Nietzschean-inflected readings of Marx on credit. Maurizio Lazzarato, in particular, reads Nietzsche together with Marx in his essay on the politics of neoliberalism and financial capitalism, *The Making of Indebted Man*. Lazarrato is engaged in his own genealogy of the debtor prior to a neoliberal form of governance that produces a different subject of economic interest, a different *homo economicus*, namely indebted man. See Maurizio Lazzarato, *The Making of the Indebted Man*. Deleuze's "Postscript on the Societies of Control" belongs to this constellation when it claims, modifying Foucault, "Man is no longer man enclosed, but man in debt." See Gilles Deleuze, "Postscript on the Societies of Control," *October* 59 (Winter 1992), 6.

⁴⁴ See Marx, "Excerpts from James Mill's *Elements of Political Economy*" in *Early Writings* (New York: Vintage Books, 1975).

⁴⁵ Lazarrato, *Making of Indebted Man*, 58.

performs for the creditor: the debtor's *ethos* in the ethical sense becomes an *ethos* in the dramatic one, namely the character or *persona* controlled by the creditor, and the debtor's entire person *represents* and embodies the repayment of debt for the creditor:

When a rich man gives credit to a poor man [. . .] the life of the poor man and his talents and activity serve the rich man as a guarantee of the repayment of the money lent. That means, therefore, that all the *social* virtues of the poor man, the content of his vital activity, his existence itself, represent for the rich man the reimbursement of his capital with the customary interest. Hence the death of the poor man is the worst eventuality for the creditor. It is the death of his capital together with his interest (215-216).

The creditor-debtor relation as it is thought in the mid-19th century thus circumscribes a relation wherein the human body becomes collateral for a debt obligation and whereby character ('the morality of a man' or the ability to keep one's word) becomes the economic measure of human value.⁴⁶ The creditor-debtor relation is inscribed in a hermeneutics of human morality, a reading of character that affixes a quantifiable value to the human backed and animated by the body, the flesh, of the human.⁴⁷ This depends indeed on a certain performance of the debtor: to live *for* the

⁴⁶ This is by no means restricted to the mid-19th century. The lineage of texts that trace a relation between credit and character or moral and economic economies is long and includes Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice*, Nietzsche's *Genealogy of Morals*, Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations*, etc. Recent scholarly works have addressed this issue in particular since the 2007/2008 subprime mortgage crisis (largely) in the United States. See for example: Richard Dienst, *Bonds of Debt*, Maurizio Lazzarato, *The Making of the Indebted Man*, David Graeber, *Debt: The First 5000 Years*, Annie McClanahan, *Dead Pledges*, Margaret Atwood, *Payback: Debt and the Shadow Side of Wealth*. For scholarly work on the relation between character and credit in literature see especially Deidre Lynch: *The Economy of Character: Novels, Market Culture, and the Business of Inner Meaning*. McClanahan forcefully argues that Lazzarato misreads Marx's in his emphasis on the ethics and subjectivity of debt. As McClanahan suggests, Marx's point is that the debtor's body serves as "ultimate collateral for the loan" in a way that obviates any need for "either accountability or for guilt, let alone ethics of subjectivity" since all that is necessary for the reinforcement of the credit-debt relation is the power to enact violence or deprive debtors of their livelihood. This, and not any sort of ethics, McClanahan argues is the reason one pays back a loan, even if one feels guilty or accountable for the loan. See *Dead Pledges*, 94-95.

⁴⁷ Eric Santner attempts to think the human body and its flesh literally as the subject-matter of political economy, as the substance of what Marx calls the "gespenstische Gegenständlichkeit" of value. He does so as an extension to his project on the political theology of sovereignty; in this light the new subject matter of political economy is a kind of secularization that still invests in the liturgical practices of glorification that have characterized other quasi-theological relations to symbolic material (i.e. the King's body). Santner's understanding of value is tied to this quasi-theology: "value is related to valor, glory, radiance, splendor" (107) and his notion of economy draws heavily on Agamben's theological one in *The*

creditor while the creditor becomes spectator and hermeneut of this performance.

While Nietzsche and Marx are writing on the human-moral underpinnings of the credit-debt relation, Keller is a struggling author who is heavily indebted and hopes to receive an advance from his publisher.⁴⁸ As he writes in a letter to his publisher: “Hier muß ich Ihnen mitteilen, daß ich im letzten Sommer durch Schuldverhältnisse gezwungen war, einen Kontrakt abzuschließen.”⁴⁹ And it is during this time that Keller composes his story of imposture in which a poor tailor turns wealthy capitalist. *Kleider machen Leute* not only examines the signs of human value (what ‘makes’ people) and the forms of conduct that motivate them, embedding this problematic in a fiction about reading and recognizing such signs, but casts this in terms of a credit-debt dynamic as well. Unlike Nietzsche’s genealogy or Marx’s, Keller does not aim in *Kleider* to demystify a social relation to value by pointing to the fictions that have obscured value but to produce his own fiction of an enchanted semiology of value, in an economy at once

Kingdom and the Glory. Eric Santner, *The Weight of All Flesh: On the Subject-Matter of Political Economy*. See also Santner, *The Royal Remains: The People’s Two Bodies and the Endgames of Sovereignty* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011).

⁴⁸ Like Nietzsche’s debtor, who offers his self, life, wife, or body parts not only as a pledge to generate trust in his promise to repay but also as a measure of self-discipline to assure himself of his “Verpflichtung” and reinforce his conscience, Keller adds clauses to his contracts with publishers that legally establish penalties for failing to meet deadlines. These deadlines also are meant to corroborate his character as non-delinquent author: “Ich habe aber schon bei den Vieweg’schen Erzählungen mit Erfolg die Maßregel getroffen, bei einer allfälligen Verspätung über einen festgesetzten Termin hinaus mir einen Abzug oder eine Konventionalstrafe gefallen zu lassen, da ich von dem Romane her im Geruch eines säumigen Autors stehe. Daher schlage ich auch jetzt wieder zur Sicherstellung des Verlegers vor, daß nach dem festgestellten Termin mir für jeden Monat weiterer Säumniß 25 Thaler von dem verabredeten Honorar abgezogen werden” (Letter to Franz Duncker, September 19, 1855). In another letter written less than a week later this plan has already seemed to backfire: “Ich habe mich mit den Stipulationen, die wir neulich getroffen, in eine Sackgasse verrannt . . . Ich habe nämlich über die Hälfte des Honorares schon in der Weise disponirt, daß ich sie nothwendig gleich jetzt brauche. In dieser Rücksicht habe ich auch die Konventionalstrafe vorgeschlagen, welche ohne jene Voraussetzung keine rechte oder billige Begründung hätte; denn wenn ich nicht spätestens vom 1ten Oktober an jeden Tag, ohne alle Ablenkungen und Sorgen, zu der Arbeit verwenden kann, so wird es nicht möglich sein, das Buch bis zum 15t. Nov. respektive bis zum 15t. Oktober druckreif fertig zu kriegen und ich würde jener Strafe verfallen, ohne die dieselbe begründende Wohlthat eines Vorschusses genossen zu haben . . . Den Konventionalabzug aber aufzuheben oder den Schlußtermin hinauszusetzen geht nicht wohl an, weder in Ihrem noch in meinem Interesse” (September 28, 1855).

⁴⁹ Keller to Vieweg, April 2, 1855, in *Dichter über ihre Dichtung*, ed. Klaus Jeziorkowski, 252-3.

moral, material, and narrative, that would align external (outward appearance) and internal (character) signs. Keller is interested less in how credit-debt relations produce and tame subjectivities than in how a fiction of character blurs distinctions between roles of creditor and debtor. Keller's text, moreover, participates in the reorganization of the signs of value that Nietzsche and Marx identify in the course of the nineteenth-century. As part of an *Umwertung der Werte*, *Kleider machen Leute* complexly explores the relation between character and credit, both in terms of how the Goldacher evaluate Strapinski and find him credible as count, or do not, as in the case of the skeptic accountant Melcher Böhni, but also through the way the novella confounds Strapinski's imaginary and real identity and links this to the issue of culpability [*Verschuldung*] and debt [*Schulden*]. The fiction of economic fortune, of Strapinski's ascent from rags to riches, rests on a fiction about character and a fiction of reading character, fictions that form the basis of the moral-economic problem of guilt and debt.

In this way, Keller's transfiguration is also a kind of transvaluation, one that explores the way in which signs of value (including *Kleider*) are embedded in relations of credit and debt. *Kleider machen Leute* cannot put an end to its *Schuldenverkehr* and in this regard offers an exemplary instance of *Die Leute von Seldwyla*: in the final turn of the novella, which ends with the word "Rache," the cycle of credit and debt, the ledger of payback, remains as remainder. In this regard, the story is less an instantiation of Glück as it is a reflection on the literary conditions of possibility for a fiction of Glück.⁵⁰ What Keller will repeatedly call "Fügungen" in the novella

⁵⁰ David Wellbery has suggested that with the end of the Enlightenment, *Glück* becomes ineffable and can no longer be integrated into any conceptual schematic. For this reason, Wellbery suggests, a modern understanding of *Glück* can only be sought in literature, in narratives that stage "auf wie vielfältige Weise Glück in ein je individuelles Leben eingehen kann." Wellbery, "Prekäres und unverhofftes Glück," 50. Keller's story takes this a step further with the skeptical "Vision des Glücks" that Benjamin ascribes to Keller's epic narrative style: *Glück* becomes something that can only be had in a fictional register (in imposture, a fictional narrative, an adage, etc.) and is thus always threatening to come undone. The

– the points of conjuncture that bring about some felicitous turn – all become “fällig” at some point, even as Keller’s novella strive to hold its fiction together as something valuable, meaningful and not determined by “blindes Vertrauen auf den Zufall.”

The “Fügung” of Fortune II (Kleider machen Leute)

Kleider machen Leute begins with a double insolvency: because of the “Falliment irgendeines Seldwyler Schneidermeisters,” the tailor Wenzel Strapinski loses “seinen Arbeitslohn mit der Arbeit zugleich” and is forced, like many journeymen, to wander, “in Ermangelung irgendeiner Münze,” in search of pay (298). The novella ends, however, with a fortune (“Vermögen”) that has “doubled” as Strapinski, who now has “ebenso viele Kinder” as he does wealth, becomes a very solvent “Schneidermeister” (346). By narrating a story of insolvency that ends in solvency rather than “krabbelige Arbeit,” Keller’s novella promises to offer a Seldwylian “Abfällsel:” the novella takes exception to the cycle of plebian “bankruptcies/insolvencies” that characterizes Seldwyla in the first preface by telling of the good economic fortune of Strapinski, by telling a story of valorization rather than immiseration. The plot of the story revolves around an *Urfabel* of mistaken identity in which Strapinski is mistaken in the nearby town of Goldach for an eclectic Polish count on the basis of his outward appearance and a ruse by a coachman who offers Strapinski a ride into town. The solution to his insolvency comes not in the form of begging (“Fechten”) – the normal fate of an impoverished journeyman⁵¹ – but through a series of felicitous and not so felicitous turnings that allow

success or failure of Glück, and whether it is simply transitory or enduring, relies on the degree to which these fictions can be singularly actualized as narrative text. But in Keller’s prose, there is an expiration date on Glück. This is why the *Schmied seines Glückes* must literally become a smith of nails.

⁵¹ *Fechten*, begging, was a normal source of income for journeymen, especially tailors. As one journeyman notes, “Da unser Geld knapp war und Fechten zu keener Zeit als Schände für einen

Strapinski to feign the identity of Polish count and live off the good graces and generosity of the Goldach villagers who eagerly welcome the mysterious figure into their small but wealthy town. After Strapinski's exposure through a carnevalesque redoubling of the imposture fiction – a metafictional performance in which an actor plays Strapinski playing poor tailor turned fake count – all seems lost for the tailor until a fortunate turn of events not only puts him back on his feet but pardons him of any fault in the incident, delivers retribution, and rewards him with wife, children, and financial success.

Keller's novella thereby stages Strapinski's turn from lack to plenty as a fiction of *Glück* in a double sense: Strapinski ultimately comes to economic fortune, to *Glück*, via a precarious fiction of identity, which in the text takes the form of an 'imposture' that is put to an end through a further fiction,⁵² a theatrical scene of revealing and finally a scene of anagnorisis, in order finally that Strapinski's fortune be sealed not under the pretense of false identity but for the poor tailor himself. Only then can this fiction follow a pattern of (social, economic, and literary) *Aufstieg* that would occur as an exceptional event worth writing about. The fiction of fortune is operative in a second way since only an act of fortune, a *Glück*, can ensure that Strapinski's story will not end as it began, in misfortune, but in a *Glück* that would last and in a story that would be

Handwerksburschen galt . . ." or "... wir sollten beide bei den Schneidermeistern Umschau halten Hier sei bemerkt, daß bei einer Umschau bei den Meistern des Gewerbes die Geschenke wesentlich reichlicher ausfielen als beim Fechten; dafür hatte man aber auch die moralische Verpflichtung, wenn . . . ein Meister erklärte, er habe Arbeit, diese anzunehmen" (223). For journeyman, ethical conduct and economic practice are deeply connected. Such practices were highly formalized in the codes of conduct that applied to the various guilds of handicrafts: "Jeder Beruf hatte seine eigenen Handwerksgebräuche, die Zunftformeln, die man genau kennen mußte; z.B. beim Umschauen nach Arbeit, wenn man sein Geschenk holt, beim Ausschenken usw. Diese Formeln kannte jeder abgefundene oder zünftige Geselle" (224). "Wanderschaft und Wanderbräuche" in vol. 1 of *Deutsche Sozialgeschichte: Dokumente und Skizzen*, ed. Werner Pols.

⁵² Keller's text cites more than actually stages an imposture since the tailor is mistaken for a count and then performs as one. Much of the narrative is concerned with exploring what distinguishes imposture from performance or play.

worth telling.⁵³ Keller's novella thus reflects on the fictional, and in this case narrative, parameters of fortune while embedding the latter in Seldwyl's *Schuldenverkehr*: it brings together issues of narrative motivation (on the level of plot, or *mythos*) and the credibility of character (on the level of *ethos*) to reflect on what makes a person and story valuable. Because the central event of Keller's novella is a character's turn from lack to plenty – the valorization of Strapinski as character – the Aristotelian primacy of *mythos* over *ethos* doesn't hold: Keller's novella, as we will see, makes the question of *ethos* a matter of plot, and turns the creation of a credible character into the primary task of plot. The concatenation of events, the narrative economy or *mythos* of the novella stands in the service of generating a solvent character.

Keller's novella, as has recently been argued of many mid-19th-century texts, displays a high level of self-reflexivity in the sense that it incorporates knowledge about the sorts of literary devices and techniques it deploys and about its own conditions of possibility: Keller's novella, like others in the Seldwyla cycle, interpolates other forms and traditions of literary writing for its narrative. In the case of *Kleider machen Leute*, Strapinski's imposture is cast by the narrator as a sort of Bildungsroman in which Strapinski swiftly becomes the "Held eines artigen Romans" (319). This "Roman" begins with Strapinski's arrival in the town of Goldach, where he is mistaken for a count, and ends not with the theatrical exposure by his "Doppelgänger" but with a final turn in fortune, an "abermaliger Glückswechsel," – a scene of anagnorisis – that reunites Strapinski with his former love interest, who declares the novel to be over: "Keine Romane

⁵³ David Wellbery has discussed the precarity of literary representations of *Glück* in terms of the paradox that "ihr [die Glücksdarstellung] Gelingen allererst durch die Leidenserfahrung ermöglicht wird" (16). See Wellbery, "Prekäres und unverhofftes Glück." This problem, which Wellbery sees reflected in the work of Georg Simmel as much as Georg Christoph Lichtenberg is, as Dieter Heinrich has suggested, part of a post-lapsarian "Figur-Grund-Verhältnis" between *Glück* and *Not*, or *Unglück*. Dieter Heinrich, "Glück und Not," 136. As Simmel suggests, the best part of paradise is that *Glück* can be had without any relation to its opposite.

mehr!“ (341). The Bildungsroman therefore spans precisely the distance between insolvency and wealth for Strapinski, between Strapinski as penniless journeyman and Strapinski as master who “wußte . . . gute Spekulationen zu machen.” This fiction becomes itself a “vergängliches Glück,” a temporary solution to Strapinski’s economic plight, and unfolds in the novella as a form of “Bildung” different than that of Wilhelm Meister or Heinrich Lee:⁵⁴

Er lernte in Stunden, in Augenblicken, was andere nicht in Jahren, da es in ihm gesteckt hatte, wie das Farbwesen in Regentropfen. Er beachtete wohl die Sitten seiner Gastfreunde und bildete sie während des Beobachtens zu einem Neuen und Fremdartigen um; besonders suchte er abzulauschen . . . was für ein Bild sie sich von ihm gemacht. Dieses Bild arbeitete er weiter aus nach seinem eigenen Geschmacke, zur vergnüglichen Unterhaltung der einen, welche gern etwas Neues sehen wollten, und zur Bewunderung der anderen . . . welche nach erbaulicher Anregung dursteten (319).

Strapinski performs the role of a Polish count (by singing a Polish folk song, for instance) through ‘observation’ and ‘ablauschen,’ poetically producing (*bildet*) a fiction of character, an *ethos* (complete with Strapinski’s “eigenen Geschmacke” – a veritable aesthetic education).⁵⁵

More than aesthetic Bildung, however, Strapinski’s cultivated self-fashioning is a kind of labor performed on his “Bild,” a labor that becomes available to the otherwise unemployed tailor.⁵⁶ one that elicits the investment of the “umsichtige Geschäftsmänner” in Goldach who, “stets begierig auf eine Abwechslung, ein Ereignis, einen Vorgang,” provide the poetic capital necessary for Strapinski’s “Roman.” “Das vierspännige Wagen, das Aussteigen des Fremden,

⁵⁴ *Kleider* has a complex relation to Wilhelm Meister: Meister’s “mich selbst, ganz wie ich bin, auszubilden” becomes Strapinski’s “Ich bin nicht ganz so wie ich scheine.” In the final collapsing of any dichotomy between *Schein* and *Sein*, Strapinski, of course, is exactly as he seems.

⁵⁵ On Bild and Bildung see Koselleck, “Zur anthropologischen und semantischen Struktur der Bildung,” in *Begriffsgeschichten*, Frankfurt: 2006, 105-154.

⁵⁶ Strapinski as *Schneider* would have to be compared to the figure of the *Schneider* in Marx, which shows up at a crucial moment in Marx’s definition of labor, when he is defining the value form. There the context is the abstraction from specific forms of labor through the value-relation of exchange. The tailor shows up, in other words, only to disappear as an example of abstract labor, a “produktive Verausgaubung von menschlichem Hirn, Muskel, Nerv, Hand usw., und in diesem Sinn [. . .] menschliche Arbeit.” Keller’s Schneider confronts Marx’s Schneider (as a figure for his theory of value) not only with an inversion (*Kleider machen Leute* and not the other way around) but also with the *Arbeitslosigkeit* of his tailor, who has to spin something else: not material labor but the labor of fiction.

sein Mittagessen . . . waren so einfache und natürliche Dinge, daß die Goldacher . . . ein Ereignis darauf aufbauten wie auf einen Felsen” (315).⁵⁷ By turning the most simple and natural occurrence into an event, the residents of Goldach generate the plot or fiction (*mythos*) within which Strapinski’s character (*ethos*) will be embedded, a fiction of character that Keller’s novella inserts into a story of insolvency. The fictional plot of Keller’s novella thus revolves around the plot of a fictional “Roman” that is about producing an exceptional, if fictional, event – and for the unemployed tailor this becomes a form of literary labor performed together with the businessmen of Goldach (“eines artigen Romanes, an welchem er gemeinsam mit der Stadt und liebvoll *arbeitete*”). In a town in which “keiner dem andern etwa schuldig blieb,” Strapinski lives from the credit of his “Ereignis,” a credit extended to him by the residents of Goldach. This credit is granted to him not only in the form of credibility he garners as the hero of an “artigen Romans” (317) but also in the material form of money and gifts that Strapinski receives from the Goldacher residents under the pretense that he is an eclectic Polish count. Strapinski’s fortune – a “vergängliches Glück” – is thus a double one, backed by the material and immaterial investments he receives.

In its material form, the credit that underwrites Strapinski’s performance as count solves more than his economic need, it also solves Strapinski’s other “Bedürfnis:” “etwas Zierliches und Außergewöhnliches vorzustellen, wenn auch nur in der Wahl der Kleider” (319). While this “Bedürfnis” first expresses itself in the story through the elegant coat that Strapinski wears, which lends him “ein edles und romantisches Aussehen,” it now wanders, like Strapinski himself, from fashion to self-fashioning. Paradoxically, his ability to fashion himself in more

⁵⁷ See Gerhard Kaiser on this point as well: “Bei näherem Zusehen kann man die gesamte Hochstaplerkonstellation als nichts anderes den ein ausgefallenes Verfahren der Kreditgewährung an Wenzel lesen. Seine Selbstinszenierung ist ein Lernprozeß, bei dem er fähig wird, dieses Kapital für sich arbeiten zu lassen.” In Kaiser, *Gottfried Keller: Das gedichtete Leben*, 347.

noble ways is precisely what, in the form of the coat, originally exacerbates his economic despair as an unemployed tailor: because of the noble appearance of the coat, “Fechten fiel ihm äußerst schwer . . . ja schien ihm gänzlich unmöglich” (298) and in this way he becomes a “Märtyrer seines Mantels . . . und [litt] Hunger, so Schwarz wie des letztern Sammetfutter” (299). If Keller defines transfiguration as an act of “Veredelung,”⁵⁸ the protagonist’s self-ennobling exposes the paradox of transfiguration as an everyday praxis.

As martyr, Strapinski falls even harder than the “Falliment” of his former employer: he falls entirely out of any economy based upon the satisfaction of material needs. His need is his ethos or habitus of transfiguring himself: “Solcher Habitus war ihm zum Bedürfnis geworden, ohne daß er etwas Schlimmes oder Betrügerisches dabei im Schilde führe.” In his role as count in Goldach, Strapinski finds an opportunity to practice this habitus in such a way that the tragedy of his attire can become a comedy of errors. The shift the text suggests from habitus to need inserts the production of or work on character – a character that *seems* more than it is – into an economy:⁵⁹ self-fashioning and cultivating a romantic appearance aggravate the insolvency of Strapinski the tailor until the proper fictional mode is found within which Bildung can generate credit for the count. The ‘imposture’ entails a move from insolvent martyr to solvent count via a fiction that is self-proliferation, like the ‘enumerative catalogues’ (Nägele) of all the things Strapinski receives as count:

... als er spät erwachte, sah er zunächst den prächtigen Sonntagsschlafröck . . . ferner ein Tischlein mit allem möglichen Toilettenwerkzeug bedeckt. Sodann harten eine Anzahl Diensthofen, um Körbe und Koffer, angefüllt mit feiner Wäsche, mit Kleidern, mit Zigarren, mit Büchern, mit Stiefeln, mit Schuhen, mit Sporen, mit Reitpeitschen, mit Pelzen, mit Mützen, mit Hüten, mit Socken, mit Strümpfen, mit Pfeifen, mit Flöten und Geigen, abzugeben von seiten der gestrigen Freunde, mit der angelegentlichen Bitte, sich

⁵⁸ See Keller’s review of his fellow Swiss contemporary Jeremias Gottfhelf.

⁵⁹ In another way, through this emphasis on habitus as need, as hexis, one could say, Keller collapses any distinction between being and having, or being and seeming.

dieser Bequemlichkeiten einstweilen bedienen zu wollen (315).

Like the Virginian cigars Strapinski is offered the day before, this inventory of gifts is “durchaus nicht käuflich” (307). It is consumed by the reader and by Strapinski under the premise of fiction, which is to say upon credit.

Through the fiction of his “Roman,” Strapinski enters “eine andere Welt” in which signs of lack turn to signs of plenty that have to proliferate in order to keep spinning the fiction. The logic of this turn is twofold. On the one hand, it involves a quasi-Romantic multiplication of what is already there: Strapinski’s *Kleider* become even more *Kleider* through the gifts; his proclivity for romantic and elegant self-fashioning multiplies into an elaborate fiction). On the other hand it involves a poetic-Realist logic of transfiguration that turns what is into something exceptional and better, a logic that the text casts in terms of a certain hermeneutics of signs: “Denn er [Strapinski] möchte tun oder lassen, was er wollte, alles wurde als ungewöhnlich und nobel ausgelegt” (313).

If this is the logic of transfiguration, it quickly becomes one of *Verwertung*: creating value where there was none. This logic is figured through a kind of semiotic alchemy. Strapinski, in a first reaction to the lavish “Warenlager” he receives, reaches for the thimble he carries in his pocket “in Ermangelung irgendeiner Münze,” to determine whether he is dreaming or awake (315). When Strapinski finds his “Fingerhut” in his pocket, it no longer compensates for a lack of coin but sits “traulich zwischen dem gewonnenen Spielgelde.” The thimble turns here from a sign of lack to a sign of plenty, one that metonymically indexes both Strapinski’s insolvency and solvency in the story. Moreover, as a sign for the quasi-alchemy of generating currency where there was none, the thimble avows the reality of the fiction, as it were, the reality of Strapinski’s *Roman*. In this function the thimble is consistent in signifying the potential of *Verwertung*: it is

both a sign of Strapinski's occupation as tailor (what he is) and a sign of what he can do (his habitus or what he has), namely spin fictions of fortune. And while this fortune is enacted through a shift from lack to plenty, insolvency to solvency, coins that are there which weren't before, the thimble's presence in both worlds, as it were, collapses the difference between seeming and being, the fiction of the Roman and the 'reality' of the imposture, indeed between being and having.

Keller's assimilates this collapse of *Sein* and *Schein* into the economic semiology (or semiotic economy) of the story and calls it an "Art moralisches Utopien," one which Strapinski reads as the ability of signs (the signs of businesses) to index his fortune, indeed to serve as allegories with a kind of practical power:

er [Strapinski] glaubte sich in einer anderen Welt zu befinden. Denn als er die Aufschriften der Häuser las . . . war er der Meinung sie bezögen sich auf die besonderen Geheimnisse und Lebensweisen jedes Hauses und es sähe hinter jeder Haustüre wirklich so aus, wie die Überschriften angab . . . So war er geneigt zu glauben, die wunderliche Aufnahme, welche er gefunden, hänge hiemit im Zusammenhang, so daß zum Beispiel das Sinnbild der Waage, in welcher er wohnte, bedeute, daß dort das ungleiche Schicksal abgewogen und ausgeglichen und zuweilen ein reisender Schneider zum Grafen gemacht würde (317).⁶⁰

In Strapinski's "Roman," the signs of the village become agents of the tailor's fortune, of his economic miracle or *Wirtschaftswunder* ("wunderliche Aufnahme"), through an elision of the difference between *Sein* and *Schein*: behind every door, things *really* are as their signs indicate just as Strapinski can really become the elegant count (the character) that his outward appearance (his attire) suggests. In Goldach's moral utopia, the traces of authorial labor behind Strapinski's

⁶⁰ Kreienbock sees Strapinski's behavior in the inn, for instance his "schüchternes Zögern," as an "Ausbuch des direkten Konsums, welche es erlaubt, einen semantischen Mehrwert zu erzeugen und das ungeschickte Verhalten als Zeichen verborgenen Vermögens zu deuten" (131). The semantic surplus-value that Kreienbock mentions is, I find, a crucial though not primary source of Strapinski's *Vermögen*. While Keller clearly links the semiotics of behavior to Strapinski's economic fortune and misfortune, this alone is not enough to motivate the tale of fortune. See also Kaiser's afterword to *Die Leute von Seldwyla*: "Landeswohl als Haspelei, Verfassung als Herstellung von Fäßchen" (690).

fictional character, the “Geheimnis” of self-fashioning, are erased and signs are no longer arbitrary, that is to say their meaning isn’t differential: in Goldach, Strapinski can become the eclectic nobleman, the hero of the novel, which he already appears to be, just as the thimble [“Fingerhut”] affirms the reality of his new fortune. In this moral utopia, Strapinski neither finds his *Glück* nor smiths it (as in the novella that follows *Der Schmied seines Glückes*) but rather has it all along and must curate and develop it. In this way, his fortune is not simply the result of a *Los* or part of the *Glückspiel* in which he plays. Nor is it fate, which can only be read as a kind of ironic code-word for habitus: i.e. when the narrator suggests, “Das Schicksal machte ihn mit jeder Minute Größer,” this line immediately follows a description of Strapinski’s “guten Anstand” and his modesty in properly folding his Mantel (“seinen Mantel sittsam zusammennehmend”). Strapinski’s fortune is not a “*Fortuna*” and not the result of a lottery but, as Gerhard Kaiser has suggested, “Kredit + Arbeit + weiteres Glück” (afterword to *Leute von Seldwyla*, 690). This last variable is the *Glück* created by narrative fiction.

Casting Strapinski’s transition from tailor to count as a matter of balance (“abgewogen” and “ausgeglichen”) with the symbol of the scale, Keller’s narrator points to the calculus that underwrites his fortune: not the credits, but the debts [“*Verschuldung*”] that are incurred. Strapinski himself is indeed as concerned that his real status as a poor tailor will be revealed, that his performance will fail, as he is about paying off the debts he accumulates through the hospitality and generosity of the Goldach villagers (with the lavish lunch meal in the “Waage” tavern and the inventory of luxury goods) under the pretense that he is a wealthy count: “er [nährte] beständig den Vorsatz . . . die Mittel zu gewinnen . . . alles zu vergüten, um was er die gastfreundlichen Goldacher gebracht hatte” (319). Debt is here an obligation to recompense, inscribed in a logic of quid-pro-quo that is entirely asymmetrical. While the credit lent by the

Goldacher villagers provides them with the “Ereignis” that they seek in their own novella, for Strapinski it is felt as debt, that is, as financial obligation and moral imperative: “er [wollte] seinen Verbindlichkeiten nachkommen” (320). This is precisely the logic of *Schuldenverkehr* as narrative principle in *Seldwyla*: the bond or “Verbindlichkeit” is not dissolved or forgiven but opens onto an ever unfolding, proliferating narrative horizon): “Anstatt aber kurz abzubinden, seine Schulden geradaus zu bezahlen und abzureisen . . .” (320). Strapinski remains, bonded as it were, in the *Roman*.

In Keller’s economy of fortune, Glück can be had only on credit and not by sheer force of will. In a scene that cites the dichotomy of the Bildungsroman’s forced choice between two alternatives (business or poetry), Keller casts alternatives that involve red ink on both sides. Strapinski, ready to leave town and fictitious identity behind with the bit of money he has won from a lottery finds himself at a crossroads between “Glück, Genuß und Verschuldung” and “Arbeit, Entbehrung, Armut, Dunkelheit” (318). The alternative is noteworthy in that both sides imply a lack: the forked path presents an economic alternative between debt (living off the credit of the Goldacher) and labor (the grueling belated labor of Seldwyla), an alternative which maps onto a moral one between enjoyment/pleasure/fortune and deprivation/poverty/gloom; the fact that only the latter path (without “Verschuldung”) would ensure a “gutes Gewissen” anticipates the genealogical origin of “schlechtes Gewissen” in the credit-debt relation that Nietzsche would identify a decade later. Crucially, however, the choice is obviated by the hand of the narrator: in a move that thwarts Strapinski’s decision to leave town with a clear conscience, a wagon in which Strapinski’s romantic interest, Nettchen, sits, suddenly appears and prompts Strapinski to return “unwillkürlich” to Goldach to continue his performance as false count. The debts Strapinski incurs persist. In the place of a “balanced” scale, the *Schuldenverker* continues and

indeed repeats as if incessantly. A few lines after the crossroads scene (one possible way out of the *Schuldenverkehr*) the story of debt continues yet again: “anstatt aber kurz abzubinden, seine Schulden gradaus zu bezahlen und abzureisen” Strapinski remains caught in the fiction of identity.

While the compulsion to indebtedness characterizes what Walter Benjamin calls *Schuldzusammenhang* as the net that *Schicksal* casts,⁶¹ Keller attempts to balance the ledger of Strapinski’s double fiction and resolve the distance between Strapinski as tailor and Strapinski as count through a series of “Fügungen,” i.e. by invoking the force of contingency in its literal sense of “Fügung,” of ‘coming together.’⁶² “Fügung” as a narrative principle of concatenation is what guarantees the *Schein* and *Wahrscheinlichkeit* of Keller’s narrative fiction and what unites the novella’s multiple fictional levels. When a coachman initiates the romance/Roman of false identity by naming the poor tailor “Graf Strapinski” to the villagers in Goldach, the narrator remarks: “Nun mußte es sich aber fügen, daß dieser [the poor tailor/protagonist], ein geborener Schlesier, wirklich Strapinski hieß, Wenzel Strapinski, mochte es nun ein Zufall sein oder mochte der Schneider sein Wanderbuch im Wagen hervorgezogen, es dort vergessen und der Kutscher es zu sich genommen haben” (306). “Fügung” here occurs as a moment of chance or “Zufall” (something different in this regard than Benjamin’s *Schicksal*) that brings together, “fügt,” Strapinski’s identity as tailor with his identity as count, and in this way elides the difference between fictional levels, the *Roman* of the Polish count and the non-romance of the

⁶¹ Benjamin, “Schicksal und Charakter,” in *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 2, bk. 1, 175.

⁶² The Grimm *Wörterbuch* defines Fügung as: “das in seinen verbindungen auszer aller menschlichen berechnung befindliche, zu einem ergebnis oder zu ergebnissen führende walten, die aus dem in seinen verbindungen auszer aller menschlichen berechnung stehenden walten hervorgehende anordnung.” *Deutsches Wörterbuch von Jacob und Wilhelm Grimm*.

poor tailor. Even as the narrative – as an assurance of its probability – provides two logical possibilities for this “Fügung,” one Romantically felicitous and the other realistically banal, the conjuncture is preceded by the logic of *Schuldenverkehr*, in this instance in the guise of payback: the coachman’s joke, the narrator shares, is an act of revenge (“um sich an dem Schneiderlein zu rächen” [305]) for the protagonist’s failure to deliver a ‘word of thanks.’ In this regard, the Roman of imposture or *Hochstapelei* in *Kleider* – which itself is thrown into critical relief insofar as the novella questions Strapinski’s active role in perpetuating his fictitious identity – is a fiction of *Schuldenverkehr*: it is inserted in an ethical-economic economy of payback and penance, guilt (*Schuld*) and retribution, a quid-pro-quo structure that begins with the coachman’s revenge and ends with the novella’s final words: “Undank oder Rache.” Inscribed in this *Schuldzusammenhang* – the consequence of the fall out of Seldwyla’s paradise of credit – the novella’s conjunctures, their *Zufälle*, are themselves part of the initial “Falliment” that opens the story. As a logic of cause and effect, conjuncture is always preceded by an insolvency or debt it can’t balance.

As a principle of narrative economy, “Fügung” is, moreover, the conjunctural logic by which Strapinski’s final fortune, his *Glück*, is to be motivated.⁶³ In two crucial ways, this mode of economic contingency aims, like any *Konjunktur*, to solve the economic crisis in the story, the dramatic scene of Strapinski’s exposure as a poor tailor; it acts in this way as an attempt to align or balance the ledger of Strapinski’s economic fate. Both forms of “Fügung” hold together the narrative fabric of the text and ultimately ensure Strapinski’s final fortune as a wealthy tailor.

The first is dramatic insofar as it involves a scene of anagnorisis in which Strapinski is

⁶³ *Fügung* is in this regard a *Eindeutschung* of “Konjunktur,” a term that, originally an astrological term for fortunate constellations, is used since the middle of the nineteenth century in the commercial or economic sense of a fortuitous economic state of affairs.

financially rescued by the daughter of Goldach's "Amtsherr." When the protagonist's romance with Nettchen, the daughter, pursued under the false premise that he is the wealthy Polish count, threatens to dissolve upon his exposure, the crisis is averted in a further dramatic turn. In a spin on the classical scene of anagnorisis that has its locus classicus in the *Odyssey*, when Odysseus' scar is recognized by Eurycleia, Strapinski recognizes the daughter of the councilman as a child from his past, for whom he played a custodial role and from whom he was tragically separated, by a contingent external feature:⁶⁴ her hair. The recognition leads to a reunion and eventually to a wedding. Structurally for the story, the scene of anagnorisis plays a number of roles. It presages the story's ending by first announcing a plot of revenge against the Seldwyla villagers that exposed Strapinski as false count: "Wir wollen nach Seldwyla gehen und dort [. . .] die Menschen, die uns verhöhnt haben, von uns abhänig machen" (341). With this, the cycle of *Schuldenvekehr* is set in motion anew; not in the form of "Verschuldung" through imposture but in the form of a structure of payback/revenge with its own economy of quid-pro-quo. Moreover, the anagnorisis draws attention to a logic of latency in Keller's novella. Just as Strapinski's habitus of self-ennobling is something he always has (something he inherits from his mother), as a constitutive but not always operative or actualized potential that Strapinski fashions into a kind of symbolic capital (though one that doesn't always work in his favor depending on the audience), the anagnorisis points to a latency in Strapinski's biography which, reactivated in this moment, will become actual capital through the marriage to Nettchen: "in Verbindung mit

⁶⁴ Terrence Cave differentiates between modern and classical anagnorisis on this ground. See Cave, *Recognitions*. Cave reads anagnorisis, like I do here, not as a kind of narrative resolution but as "'problem' moments." "At first sight anagnorisis seems to be the paradigm of narrative satisfaction: it answers questions, restores identity, and symmetry, and makes a whole hidden structure of relations intelligible. Yet the satisfaction is also somehow excessive, the reassurance too easy; the structure is visibly prone to collapse" (Cave, 489). See also on anagnorisis in German realism, Eva Geulen, "Anagnorisis statt Identifikation (Raabes *Altershausen*)."

seinem [. . .] Schwiegervater” Strapinski learns “gute Spekulationen zu machen, daß sich sein Vermögen verdoppelte und er [. . .] mit ebensovielen Kindern [. . .] ein angesehener Mann ward.” The potential of habitus (as a having or being) is turned here, through the anagnorisis, into an actualized (financial, reproductive, and social) potency. Finally, the anagnorisis puts an end to the Romantic fiction of Strapinski’s false identity, announced not incidentally in the house of the “Zinsherr” or moneylender, in Nettchen’s exclamation: “Keine Romane mehr!” The ending of romantic fiction thus rests on actualizing through this scene of recognition the conjunctures that until this point in the story gave the fiction its texture: the coincidence of Strapinski’s actual name and the name the coachman shares, the time spent in the military in Poland that provided Strapinski with just enough cultural knowledge (or lack thereof on the part of the Goldach villagers) to play the part of Polish count, the thimble that marks both the protagonist’s solvency and insolvency, etc. The anagnorisis is, then, the actual exposure of Strapinski as the exposure of the lack of anything to be exposed; it provides the event through which the Roman ends but the novella continues.

The second Fügung is juridical and involves the legal acquittal and clearing of Strapinski’s name. After Strapinski’s exposure as false count, a lawyer appears to address a complicated legal scenario: Nettchen’s father, the councilman, contests the marriage of his daughter to Strapinski and a legal battle ensues which Keller describes in the bureaucratic detail and prose only a “Stadtschreiber” could know: though the engaged couple is convinced that “das Aufgebot ihrer Ehe nach Sammlung aller nötigen Schriften förmlich stattfinden und daß gewärtigt werden solle, ob und welche gesetzliche Einsprachen während dieses Verfahrens dagegen erhoben würden und mit welchem Erfolge,” the documents and procedure nonetheless have to be examined by a lawyer since the father’s objections “bei der Volljährigkeit Nettchens

einzig noch erhoben werden [konnten] wegen der zweifelhaften Person des falschen Grafen Wenzel Strapinski” (345). At stake in this legal process is thus precisely Strapinski’s character or mask (persona), his *ethos* as determined by his “Verschuldung;” the question, in other words, of whether he is legally creditworthy and complicit to or the victim of the “Roman.” The lawyer is able to rule in his favor for the following reason:

Was die Ereignisse in Goldach betraf, so wies der Advokat nach, daß Wenzel sich eigentlich gar nie selbst für einen Grafen ausgegeben, sondern daß ihm dieser Rang von andern gewaltsam verliehen worden; daß er schriftlich auf allen vorhandenen Belegstücken mit seinem wirklichen Namen Wenzel Strapinski ohne jede Zutat sich unterzeichnet hatte und somit kein anderes Vergehen vorlag als daß er eine törichte Gastfreundschaft genossen hatte, die ihm nicht gewährt worden wäre, wenn er nicht in jenem Wagen angekommen wäre und jener Kutscher nicht jenen schlechten Spaß gemacht hätte (345).

Strapinski’s acquittal – the settlement of his debts/guilt – thus depends on him never having maliciously or even volitionally intervened in the Romantic fiction of fortune, indeed it rests precisely on the taming and rationalization of character that Nietzsche attributes to “Verantwortlichkeit:” if accountability, as Nietzsche suggests, relies on the “Sittlichkeit der Sitte” that trains the human to promise, that is, to be able to vouch in the present for themselves in the future, Strapinski’s signature acts here as the sign of his “having been present in a past now, which will remain a future now, and therefore in a now in general, in the transcendental form of newness,” as Derrida famously writes of the signature.⁶⁵ In other words, his signature, like his habitus or the scene of recognition, draws on a history that belongs to him as something that can find new contexts, be reactualized, or newly deployed in different scenarios, part of the tailor’s text, as it were. For this reason, his signature draws his history into the present as a sign for the future: Strapinski, the narrator remarks, has “nie ein Vergehen zuschulden kommen lassen,” “soweit seine Gedanken in die Kindheit zurückreichten, war ihm nicht erinnerlich, daß

⁶⁵ Derrida, “Signature, Event, Context,” in *Margins of Philosophy*, 328.

er je wegen einer Lüge oder einer Täuschung gestraft oder gescholten worden wäre” (329). The Fügung of Strapinski’s two identities through the signature that erases their difference is the birth, as Nietzsche will write, of Strapinski as a “Rechtssubjekt” out of the spirit of the debtor. It is an acquittal that does not, however, put an end to *Schuldenverkehr*.

The crisis of Strapinski’s “verlorenes Glück” (312), his *fall*, is solved through these narrative “Fügungen” that paradoxically put an end to all fiction (“Keine Romane mehr!” [341]) in order to ultimately realize Strapinski’s fortune not in the Romanticism of Strapinski’s fictional identity but in the realism of *Seldwyla*: this would be the transfigurative *Verwertung* of the poor tailor, the final “Ausgleich” of Keller’s poetic justice. The turn to a ‘real’ but prosaic “Glück,” an economic fortune, does not, however, bring the *Schuldenverkehr* to an end but proliferates it once more: Strapinski starts a successful career as a tailor in Seldwyla and establishes a sort of short-term loaning system in which Strapinski’s customers are in debt to him but must payback their debts before any more credit is extended: “Alles waren sie ihm schuldig” – “sie [klagten] untereinander . . . er presse ihnen das Blut unter den Nägeln hervor” (346). When Strapinski finally doubles his ‘fortune’ at the end of the story through ‘Spekulationen,’ he moves with Nettchen back to Goldach. The final word of the novella clarifies the kind of payback Strapinski is after: “Rache.” The story’s final words ultimately leaves the logic of debt intact in the form of payback as Strapinski’s economic answer to the “Roman” that must come to an end. If the “Fügungen” aim to acquit or balance the ledger of credit and debt, the ending of the novella turns the screw of *Schuldenverkehr* once more: Strapinski’s solvency rests on the payback he receives as the “Roman” goes on in this new structure of debt.

Debt, both in its moral and economic modes, introduces a crucial temporal dimension of the story that ‘economizes’ Glück – this is precisely what makes Strapinski’s fortune

“vergänglich” (312).⁶⁶ In the “Paradies des Kredites” credit is temporary and always already defined by its opposite: the debt to come. The “Fügungen” of Keller’s story become part of this temporal structure by cashing in on the past (Strapinski’s personal biography, i.e. his prior relation to Nettchen, his time in Poland, etc.) and making this past profitable in the present. In this way, the “Fügungen” as narrative device elide the difference between Strapinski as tailor and Strapinski as count. The limit of the “Fügungen” however remains Strapinski’s own finitude: the horizon of the *Glück* they bring with them is always death; that is the meaning of the near-death scene after his exposure as false count and the intention behind his plans with Nettchen: “Ich wäre mit dir in die weite Welt gegangen, und nachdem ich einige kurze Tage des Glückes mit dir gelebt, hätte ich dir den Betrug gestanden und mir gleichzeitig den Tod gegeben” (337). The economization of Glück through the introduction of debt in the story (a dimension that is furthermore reflected in the *Glücksspiele* of the novella) means that fortune is prone to absolute risk, i.e. to death, and to the possibility of its own “Falliment” or forfeiture. If the “Fügungen” solve the problem narratively/dramatically (through anagnorisis) and juridically (through Strapinski’s honest signature), they do so only on credit, on the deferral of Strapinski’s “Fälligkeit” and thus on the deferral of his death. Strapinski, in other words, pays – as Nietzsche and Marx suggest in their accounts of credit – with his life. In this regard, the Fügungen rupture the chain of Schuldenverkehr as the linking of “Falliment” with the forfeiture of life, thereby granting Strapinski solvency: without them he is “fällig.” But his solvency comes at the price of remaining within the economy of exchange: once solvent he makes others *fällig*.

The ending of *Kleider machen Leute* finally makes clear why, as the preface to the

⁶⁶ Cf. the economization of “Glück” in Joseph Vogl’s reading of *Fortunatus* in *Kalkül und Leidenschaft*, 177-186; and the precarization of Glück in Wellbery’s account of post-enlightenment fortune that can only come punctually; i.e. in the moment in “Unverhofftes und Prekäres Glück.”

second volume of *Seldwyla* suggests, there are no longer interesting stories to tell after the tidying up of the ledger books: the debt *Kleider* leaves standing at the end, the perpetuation of *Schuldenverkehr* in the form of revenge is the sign of difference that the narrative “Fügungen” cannot elide. As the continuation of the *Roman* in a different key, it is, in fact, the remainder or *Abfällsel* to Strapinski’s fortune, the presence of the “Antike” in the present, that Benjamin attributes to Keller’s prose, and it is the thread of *Anknüpfung* that links the poetic to the age of the locomotive. Even as the prosaic bourgeois ‘order of right’ performs the exculpation that would balance the ledgers (the dramatic and juridical Fügungen that acquit Strapinski as ‘impostor’), a certain ‘poetic justice’ remains in the form of *Schuldenverkehr*’s continuation, left discarded at the end as the novella’s *Abfällsel*. And it is precisely this remainder that makes this a story about Seldwyla.

CHAPTER THREE
Performance & Invention:
Robert Walser's Leistungsroman

“‘Das steht doch alles in den Romanen,’ erwiderte eine Privatangestellte, als ich sie bat, mir aus ihrem
Büroleben zu erzählen.”
—Siegfried Kracauer, *Die Angestellten*

Scenes of Performance

Robert Walser's novel *Der Gehülfe* (1908) begins with the clerical assistant Joseph Marti's first day on the job in the home office of the entrepreneurial engineer and inventor Carl Tobler. After breakfast at the family dining table, a brief tour of the workplace, an initiation into the “Geheimnisse der Toblerschen geschäftlichen Unternehmungen,”¹ and another hearty meal, the employee takes a seat at his desk and begins his first task: “die Zusammenstellung, die genaue Gewinnberechnung dieses Unternehmens” (14). What follows is a scene of dictation and writing, one that would have been intimately familiar to Walser who worked himself as a clerk for the Swiss engineer and inventor Carl Dubler:

Während der Angestellte nun schrieb, wobei ihm der Prinzipal von Zeit zu Zeit über die Schulter in die entstehende Leistung hinabblickte, spazierte dieser, eine krumme, langstielige Zigarre zwischen den schönen, blendend weißen Zähnen tragend, im Bureau auf und ab, um allerhand Zahlen anzugeben, die jeweils flink von einer heute noch ein wenig ungeübten Angestelltenhand nachgezeichnet wurden (14).

Between the rhythmic back and forth of the pacing boss and the dutiful work of the clerk's out-of-practice hand, the secrets of the Toblerian business enterprise would seem to be rather banal.²

¹ Robert Walser, *Sämtliche Werke in Einzelausgaben*, ed. Jochen Greven, vol. 10, *Der Gehülfe* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1985), 12. All further citations of the novel are to this edition.

² In Walser's first novel, *Geschwister Tanner* (1905), the predecessor to the protagonist of *Der Gehülfe*, Simon Tanner, quits his job when he disappointingly realizes that his position as clerk in a bookshop offers no insight into “das geheimnisvolle Wesen des Buchhandels.” Walser, *Geschwister Tanner*, 16. For this reason, Klaus-Michael Hinz reads Simon Tanner as a kind of Romantic epigone or as a “Don Quichotte des Industriezeitalters” who holds open the possibility of mystery and secret in a ‘fully

For the most part, the business consists in dictation and transcription, in bookkeeping, drafting advertisements, flyers, and sales quotes, or corresponding with business associates to promote the sale and financing of “technical [*technische*]” inventions perhaps more likely to be found in a carnival or fair than a world-market: an ostentatious clock with wings that displays billboard advertisements, a vending machine that dispenses ammunition for marksmen’s festivals, an awkward and uncomfortable wheelchair, and a ‘deep drilling machine’ [“Tiefbohrmaschine”]. As if to strengthen the sense that a written performance is transpiring before the eyes of the reader, Walser’s novel sometimes even presents the product of this writing, the “Leistung” itself, as blocked-off text for the reader:

“Setzen Sie folgendes Inserat auf.”

Joseph zog einen Bleistift und ein Notizbuch aus der Tasche. Es wurde ihm folgendes diktiert:

Für Kapitalisten!

Ingenieur sucht Anschluß an Kapitalisten zwecks Finanzierung seiner Patente.
Gewinnbringendes, absolut risikofreies Unternehmen. Offerten unter ... (47).

Writing scenes such as these frame the entrepreneurial enterprise in the novel as a different kind of inventing, farther from the romantic image of the genius inventor and closer to the uninspired rhetorical *inventio*: the systematic search for the means (capital) that would realize the engineer’s ideas. Moreover, as will be discussed below, the set-up of dictation underscores the division of labor between engineer and clerk; if the former invents, the latter, just writes. Walser’s novel thus ties its economic plot (searching for venture capital) to the rhetorical and literary exercise of advertising, which involves, like literature, a kind of embellishment: promising profits, eliding risk. While this kind of ‘enterprising’ activity shapes the plot of the

disenchanted world’ of work. Hinz, “Robert Walser’s Souveränität,” 156. Joseph Marti is quite different in this regard: even after the secrets of the Tobler enterprise have been disenchanted, he continues working, both on the tasks assigned to him by his employer and on straining to see something enchanting in his employer’s enterprise and home after all.

novel in an ironic and very prosaic modulation of the *âventiure*³ – as the medieval Romance predecessor to the risky undertakings of the entrepreneur – the novel’s emphasis lies more squarely on the enterprise as office work, directed by the engineer and executed by the clerical hand. Indeed, the many (ultimately failed) attempts in the novel to generate financial liquidity for the Tobler firm – to find “flüssige Kapitalien” or make “Geld flüssig” – always meet in some sort of writing scene, one that might more properly be called the scene of performance or *Leistung*.⁴

Narrated primarily through the perspective of the clerical assistant, Walser’s novel turns the clerk’s written “Leistungen” into its dominant mode of literary action or plot – in German the term *Handlung* signifies both – in a story that otherwise lacks almost any action whatsoever and fits Walser’s own depiction of his prose quite well: a “lange, handlungslose, realistische Geschichte.”⁵ Scenes of writing in Walser’s novel thus might be said to highlight not so much the “nicht-stabiles Ensemble von Sprache, Instrumentalität und Geste” that constitutes writing as an “Arbeit der Zivilisation” or as the “Effekt von Techniken,”⁶ – Rüdiger Campe’s standard definition of the writing scene – but rather a different aspect of this labor and a different

³ Walser’s narrator repeatedly compares the “Unternehmen” to fantastic medieval romance plots: “Was hatten technische Unternehmungen mit grünen Waldschluchten, weißen Rössern, edlen, lieben Frauengestalten und mit mutigen Taten zu tun? Ritten in früheren Jahrhunderten die Ritter und Unternehmer auch auf der ‘Reklame-Uhr’ und auf dem ‘Schützenautomaten,’ oder auf ähnlichen Gäulen herum” (99). Joseph Schumpeter also wonders whether there is any room for the Romantic hero in the modern business world: “Capitalist civilization is rationalistic ‘and anti-heroic.’ The two go together of course. Success in industry and commerce requires a lot of stamina, yet industrial and commercial activity is essentially unheroic in the knight’s sense—no flourishing of swords about it, not much physical prowess, no chance to gallop the armored horse into the enemy [. . .] in the office among all the columns of figures.” Joseph Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy*, 127-128. See also Moretti on this quote in *The Bourgeois*, 16, n. 31.

⁴ Throughout this chapter I prefer the usage of the original German *Leistung* over performance given the different though not entirely unrelated semantics of the English term.

⁵ Walser, “Eine Art Erzählung” in *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. 20, *Für die Katz. Prosa aus der Berner Zeit, 1928-1933*.

⁶ Rüdiger Campe, “Die Schreibszene. Schreiben,” 760.

materiality of literature: writing as job performance, i.e. as “Leistung.” To be sure, scenes of writing abound in Walser that frame the act of writing as a labile nexus of instrument, gesture, and language, as many scholars have noted.⁷ But in *Der Gehülfe* and in Walser’s other clerical texts these writing scenes are figured, first and foremost, as scenes of “Leistung” that transpire not at the literary author’s desk but, like many of Kafka’s, “inmitten der Zeichenbretter und Zirkel und umherliegenden Bleistifte” in the workspace of the technical office or comptoir (9).⁸

The Leistungsroman

Walser’s novel narrates the humdrum life of the clerical assistant as largely a series of such *Leistung*-scenes, collapsing any distinction between work and life in a space that is both workplace and home, housing both family and the “technisches Bureau.” This chapter argues that Walser’s novel of clerical life is not a Bildungsroman but, as the mise-en-scène of the scene of Leistung suggests, a novel of performance – a *Leistungsroman*. The genre of the Leistungsroman rewrites the ‘value form’ of the modern novel (its economy of meaning) by highlighting a different teleology, trajectory, and structure than the Bildungsroman as a “‘symbolic form’ of modernity.”⁹ The Leistungsroman gives a different form to life, as this chapter will show, and is structured around a tension between two kinds of activities: *Leistung* and *Erfindung*. Walser’s Leistungsroman comprises, in this regard, the story of a set of divisions: between invention and performance, between the engineer and the clerical assistant, between a kind of Promethean foresight and an Epimethean afterthought (“Nachdenken” in the language of

⁷⁷ On the furnishings of these scenes of writing and their ergonomics in particular see Jason Groves, “Unbecoming Furniture.” Stephen Kammer is one of the first to explicitly address scenes of writing in Walser’s prose in Kammer, *Figurationen und Gesten des Schreibens*. See also Elke Siegel, *Aufträge aus dem Bleistiftsgebiet: Zur Dichtung Robert Walsers*.

⁸ The comptoir as a primary setting for the writing scene has a prominent place in German literature throughout the 19th century and at least since at least the end of the 18th century. See for instance my introduction on the preface to Jean Paul’s *Siebenkäs*.

⁹ Moretti, *The Way of the World*, 5.

Der Gehülfe), and, finally, between a consequential, heroic exertion and a mode of doing that remains ultimately *folgenlos*. Moreover, the self-aware modernism of Walser's *Leistungsroman* makes the genre a reflection on literature's own value as a *Leistung*, raising questions of what precisely literature achieves qua "Erfindung." Walser's *Der Gehülfe*, published in 1908 and drafted during Walser's highly productive years in Berlin, lends itself in particular as a paradigm for Walser's *Leistungsroman* for the way the novel ties its narrative trajectory not to Wilhelm Meister's famous dictum, "mich selbst, ganz wie ich da bin, auszubilden" (Goethe), but to the protagonist clerk's anxious question: "Was leiste ich eigentlich" (*Der Gehülfe*, 55)? Taking this question as its basis, Walser carves out a quasi-genre of the modern (bourgeois) novel irreducible to its predecessors in the picaresque novel, the novel of conversion, or the novel of development or Bildungsroman, novelistic schema which Walser's novels famously cite and reject at once.¹⁰

Walser's *Leistungsroman* gains its contours through a revision and reification of the modern novel in a number of ways. First, it radicalizes and updates the novel's turn to the empiricism of ordinary life and ordinary characters, to prosaic relations¹¹ – a move towards the minor character that at times in Walser's work threatens to turn to nothing, as with the protagonist in *Jakob von Gunten* who famously aspires to become "eine reizende, kugelrunde

¹⁰ On the picaresque see Malkmus, *The German Picaro and Modernity*; Performance, moreover, is different than the "ambition" that Peter Brooks claims replaces the picaresque novel's motive: "By the nineteenth century, the picaro's scheming to stay alive has typically taken a more elaborated and socially defined form: it has become ambition. It may in fact be a defining characteristic of the modern novel (as of bourgeois society) that it takes aspiration, getting ahead, seriously, rather than simply as the object of satire . . . and thus it makes ambition the vehicle and emblem of Eros, that which totalizes the world as possession and progress." Performance might be different than either *Bildung* or ambition but it is probably no less bourgeois. The *Leistungsroman*, one could say, deeroticizes this ambition and turns it into the performance imperative.

¹¹ In his *Theory of the Novel*, Lukács points to the novel's source in empirical life but the idea is much older. See for instance, Rüdiger Campe, "Form and Life in the Theory of the Novel." The novel's relation to ordinary life is a central premise of Ian Watt's *The Rise of the Novel*, but is also crucial to Erich Auerbach's definition of modern realism (a cornerstone of the novel) in terms of the "serious treatment of everyday reality" and "the rise of more extensive and socially inferior human groups to the position of subject matter for problematic-existential representation;" see Auerbach, *Mimesis*, 491.

Null.”¹² In particular, the *Leistungsroman* is a novel of the *Angestellter* in various guises: as clerk or assistant, as *Commis* or *Gehülfe*. In this regard, the *Leistungsroman* begins in Walser’s early satirical depiction of the figure of the clerk, “Der Commis” (1902), which makes *Leistung* the basis of its attempt to turn the clerk, which Walser calls a true “Romanheld,” into the “Gegenstand einer schriftlichen Erörterung.”¹³ But the *Leistung* of the clerk will preoccupy Walser well into his later high-modernist ‘microscript’ writings.¹⁴ Second, the *Leistungsroman* pins the novel’s scope of action to clerical *Leistungen*, what Walser calls the clerk’s “Wirkungsfeld” and the plots it generates.¹⁵ *Handlung* in the *Leistungsroman* is thus the unheroic work of *Leistung*, a work Walser himself knew well from his own stints as clerical assistant. Finally, it reroutes the metaphysical leanings of the novel as an invention of possible worlds – and the imperative of probability that follows from this – through an economy of technical invention or “Erfindung” in Walser’s words; it is no longer *Kompossibilität*, probability, or

¹² On the relation between major and minor characters in the novel as part of a larger social text, see Alex Woloch, *The One vs. the Many*.

¹³ “Der Commis” in *Im Bureau: Aus dem Leben der Angestellten*, 10. Walser suggests elsewhere that all of his prose texts might be read together as “Teile einer langen, handlungslosen, realistischen Geschichte. Für mich sind die Skizzen, die ich dann und wann hervorbringe, kleinere oder umfangreichere Romankapitel. Der Roman, woran ich weiter schreibe, bleibt immer derselbe und dürfte als ein mannigfaltig zerschnittenes oder zertrenntes Ich-Buch bezeichnet werden können.” “Eine Art Erzählung,” in *Für die Katz*, 322. In this regard, his sketch of the clerk can be read together with other novels as part of a single novel about the clerk. Jochen Greven has taken Walser’s words literally and assembled a novel out of 132 prose pieces and one longer text from Walser’s Berner period to comprise this so-called “Ich-Buch.” See Walser, *Der Roman, woran ich weiter und weiter schreibe: Ich-Buch der Berner Jahre*, ed. Jochen Greven.

¹⁴ Elke Siegel analyzes Walser’s microscripts as part of the ‘work’ of art, see Elke Siegel, *Aufträge aus dem Bleistiftsgebiet*.

¹⁵ Walser’s “*Leistungsroman*” participates in an entire genre of secretary literature, a form of literature, that, as Ethel Matala de Mazza writes, “dem normativen Anspruch homogener Identität nicht Stand halten will und gegen die forschende Innenschau eigentümlicher Subjekte eine Phänomenologie der Nicht-Besonderheiten aufbietet, als Spurenlese der Einschreibungen, in denen am Ort des Eigenen das Vor-Gesetzte anderer Reden und Diskurse insistiert.” Matala de Mazza, “Angestelltenverhältnisse: Sekretäre und ihre Literatur,” 144. With its expertise in practices of writing, copying, notating, secretary literature, Bernhard Siegert and Joseph Vogl write, entails an authorship that “um so besser Bescheid über sich weiß, als sie sich von jenen Überschätzungen absetzt, mit denen seit dem 18. Jahrhundert Genies, Originale und auktoriale Schöpfer ein Privileg schreibenden Handelns beansprucht haben.” Bernhard Siegert and Joseph Vogl, eds., *Europa: Kultur der Sekretäre*, 8.

degree of order or efficiency that comprise the economy of invention, as has been argued for Leibniz in early modernity,¹⁶ but the marginal *Leistung* of a literature in which, as Walser writes of *Der Gehülfe*, “almost nothing is invented [brauchte fast nichts zu erfinden].”¹⁷ As itself a *Leistung* without invention, the *Leistungsroman* thus stakes a certain claim to realism: as Walser writes, “*Der Gehülfe* ist ein ganz und gar realistischer Roman” and it so because it is rooted in “das Leben.” In this way the *Leistungsroman* figures the ideal kind of novel: one that is so bound to life, as it were, that a kind of minimal *techne*, the technique of *Leistung* rather than invention, is enough for its realization. Thus while the inventor-engineer requires both *Leistung* and *Erfindung* for the realization of his products, the clerical assistant-cum-author is the opposite: *Leistung* and life are enough.

In *Der Gehülfe* the scene of *Leistung* begins at the workplace desk (as the performance of writing) and within the employment relationship (as the imperative to perform well) but quickly extends beyond the comptoir: scenes of performance occur in the garden, at the dining table, in Joseph Marti’s bedroom as well. Walser’s clerk is preoccupied throughout the novel with his performance, even when outside the gaze of his supervisor. Before heading to bed for the night he asks himself: “Was leiste ich eigentlich” (55)? When he awakes on a Monday morning he tells himself: “Man spaziert nicht immer, man leistet auch einmal etwas” (141). And at his boss’ family dinner table he thinks to himself: “Werde ich diesen unverschämten Appetit durch

¹⁶ On the economy of inventing possible worlds in Leibniz see chapter 3 of Vogl, *Kalkül und Leidenschaft*.

¹⁷ Walser in conversation with Carl Seelig, September 23 1945 in Seelig, *Wanderungen mit Robert Walser*, 57. Walser later emphasizes the uninspiredness of his novel and his *Leistung* of writing the novel in six weeks; indeed this is what leads him to write of clerical *Leistung* in the first place. Not incidentally, the occasion for writing the novel is, Walser remarks in a conversation with Carl Seelig, a literary prize competition: “Wie sie wissen, lud mich der Scherl-Verlag ein, mich an einem Romanwettbewerb zu beteiligen. Nun gut, warum nicht? Es fiel mir aber nichts anderes ein als mein Angestelltenverhältnis in Wädenswil. Das schrieb ich also auf, und zwar gleich ins Reine. In sechs Wochen war ich damit fertig” (99).

entsprechende Leistungen rechtfertigen” (12)? Joseph Marti sums up this concern with his *Leistung* in a reply to his boss early in the novel: “Was mich betrifft, ich glaube und hoffe des Bestimmtesten, daß ich jederzeit dasjenige zu leisten imstande sein werde, was Sie glauben werden, von mir verlangen zu dürfen” (10).

The concern with performance thus becomes, as the clerk expresses it here, a performance imperative that not only shapes the scene of clerical writing but conscribes the protagonist’s entire being and life in the novel; at stake is thus more than just job performance, it is the question, more broadly: “Werde ich taugen? (14)? In this regard, the performance imperative serves as the central motif – or motor – of the story of invention and insolvency the novel tells via the life story of the assistant. *Der Gehülfe* is a life story or biography to the tune of a job letter. In this regard, the plot of insolvency (being unable to pay lenders)¹⁸ and indebtedness (the “über und über verschuldetes Haus”) mirrors the problem of *Leistung*: both describe the same structure of obligation. And just as every novel produces a theory of life that governs its form, as Rüdiger Campe has recently argued,¹⁹ the *Leistungs*-imperative in Walser’s novel serves as a theory of life. Precisely for this reason, the individual scene of *Leistung* is turned from a single episode in the clerk’s life to its animating principle *par excellence*. This is less a vitalist than a technical or technological point in the novel: as I will discuss below, *Leistung* is a modern inflection of *techne* and in this regard the link between *Leistung* and life and *Leistung* and writing raises the very question of writing life and thus or writing a novel: what happens to writing and the novel when the ‘labor’ of writing and the technique that is the novel are conceived of as *Leistung*? Where does the threshold between *Leistung* and invention lie

¹⁸ Much of the story revolves around the engineer’s attempts to make “Geld flüssig” in order to pay the “unbezahlte Wechsel und Rechnungen.”

¹⁹ Rüdiger Campe, “Form and Life in the Theory of the Novel.”

(including the inventions or contrivances of the novel)? Or can *Leistung* also be form of inventive praxis? In examining the relation between performance and invention through the division of labor between clerk and engineer, and linking this relation to the liquidity and non-liquidity, success and failure, solvency and insolvency of the entrepreneurial enterprise, Walser's novel generates a kind of allegory of literary inventiveness, one that questions its value, not only for an industry of letters increasingly oriented towards a metric of *Leistung* but also for the novel as a form-of-life. At stake, then, is *Leistung* as *Lebensform*.

The Institution of Leistung

As Rüdiger Campe has recently shown in a study of another early Walser novel, the modern novel, as a 'formless form' that lacks traditional poetic schema and which is immanently bound to life, must invent a fiction of form.²⁰ This fiction of form, Campe suggests, might be most strongly realized in what he calls the institutional novel. The *Institutionenroman* is a different type of novel whose genealogy Campe traces to one of the earliest treatises on the novel by the French bishop Pierre Daniel Huet, and, in particular, to imaginary 'founding myths' – which get short shrift in Huet's treatise – that (re)emerge at the beginning of the 20th century to displace the traditional 'analogs' (such as biography) through which the novel gave form to an individual's life. Institutional novels invent fictions whose form depends, as Campe shows in Walser's *Jakob von Gunten*, on an ironic interplay of perpetuation and disintegration that characterizes institutions which in the etymological sense of the word 'set up' human lives and in doing so meet the novel's imperative of giving form to life.²¹ *Der Gehülfe* doubtlessly belongs to

²⁰ Campe, "Robert Walsers Institutionenroman."

²¹ Campe's reading brings together several valences of institution: institution in the sense of Arnold Gehlen's philosophical anthropology as technical constructs invented by humans to support their lives as 'deficient beings' in overly complex and contingent environments; institution in the sense of French legal theorist Pierre Legendre as a *vitam instituere*, a body of law that institutes life; and, of course, institution

this type of novel with the caveat that its dispositive is shifted from the pedagogical project of the school – in *Jakob von Gunten*, the Institut Benjamenta – to the economic project of *Leistung* and the setting of the engineering office: ‘the technical office’ of Tobler and his house (*oikos*). In other words, the institution of *Der Gehülfe* – the structure that enables life to take form in the novel – is not the courthouse with its legal order (Kafka’s *The Trial*), nor the schoolhouse with its pedagogical project (Walser’s *Jakob von Gunten*), nor the sanatorium with its mission to promote public welfare (Mann’s *Magic Mountain*) but rather the “Kontor,”²² or accounting office of the engineer and entrepreneur. The institution is, simply put, the economy or household: the *oikos* of the engineer’s home office whose order (*nomos*) is equally split between the entrepreneurial enterprise of inventing new technological devices and the management of family affairs.

This institutional difference in *Der Gehülfe* is big and small at once. On the one hand Walser’s novel retains the two logically-related strands of institutional fiction that Campe identifies as the crux of the institutional novel in *Jakob von Gunten*: the personification or family novel of the institution – evident in Joseph Marti’s efforts to integrate himself and find ‘position’ within the Tobler family household – and the topography of the institution, including the passage across and within institutionally-sanctioned borders, which *Der Gehülfe* represents through the architectonics of the Tobler villa (from the clerk’s turret room at the top of the house, via the domestic middle of the home and the garden, to the basement office) and Joseph’s various

in the Foucauldian sense of sites or media, dispositives, for the exercise of power, be it the prison, the hospital, or, importantly for Campe, the school. Though it takes its cue from philosophical anthropology and biopolitics, Campe’s notion of institution is less concerned with vitalism than with a kind of anthropological aesthetics and an understanding of the institution as the logic for how humans develop ‘techniques,’ artifices, or constructs, in short, *techne*.

²² See Campe’s individual essays on each of these institutional novels: “Body and Time: Thomas Mann’s *The Magic Mountain*” in Börnchen, Mein, Schmidt (eds.), *Thomas Mann: Neue Kulturwissenschaftliche Lektüre*; Campe, “Kafkas Institutionenroman,” Campe, “Robert Walsers Institutionenroman.”

excursions from the villa into nature (wandering in the forest, swimming in the lake) or the city. In particular, the topographic descriptions of the Tobler household in Walser's novel suggests a theory of the institution of their own. As in the institution theories that underwrite Campe's reading of the institutional novel (Gehlen, etc.), the artifice of a human-designed support mechanism 'props up' or institutes the Tobler mansion against a hostile nature: "Solch ein Haus ist nicht leicht umzuwerfen; fleißige, geschickte Hände haben es dauerhaft zusammengefügt, mit Mörtel, Balken und Ziegelsteinen. Ein Seewind weht es nicht um, selbst ein Orkan nicht einmal. Was können ein paar geschäftliche Verfehlungen solch einem Haus schaden" (103)? Moreover, the house's interplay of inner and outer ("ein Haus [besteht] aus zwei Seiten, aus einer sichtbaren und einer unsichtbaren, aus einem äußeren Gefüge und aus einem inneren Halt") – its *oikonomos*, or order of the house, threatens to come unwound precisely by "geschäftlichen und ökonomischen Fehler."²³ In this regard, Walser's *Leistungsroman* avoids the genealogical metaphor of a family or house's *Verfall* – operative for instance in Thomas Mann's *Buddenbrooks: Verfall einer Familie* (1901). If in *Der Gehülfe*, the house and economy, the *oikos* and *oikonomia*, are as inseparable as they are in Mann's novel, Walser's novel depicts not a loss of values (in the decadent, quasi-biological sense of moral *Verfall*) but a loss of value in the sense of economic *Verluste*.

The bigger difference in the novel's institutional shift to the economy of the technical office concerns the specific structures of "Setzung und Zerstörung" or "Demontage und

²³ On the economy of the house see, for instance, Thomas Wegmann, "Über das Haus: Prolegomena zur Literaturgeschichte einer affektiven Immobilie," *Zeitschrift für Germanistik* 52, no. 1 (2016): 40-60. Wegmann's essay traces a "Gleichzeitigkeit der Emotionalisierung wie Ökonomisierung des Hauses" since the late eighteenth century. "Die almahliche Ökonomisierung des Hauses pulverisiert den alteuropäischen Oikos als häusliche Sozial-, Rechts- und Herrschaftsverhältnisse und reduziert das Haus auf ein käufliches Gebäude, eine Immobilie" The breakdown of a concept of the 'ganzes Haus' (Wilhelm Heinrich Riehl) that Wegmann addresses is brought into connection with Walser's *der Gehülfe* in chapter 4 of Karl Wagner, *Herr und Knecht*.

Selbstfortsetzung” that Campe identifies as the ironic kernel of the institutional novel more generally.²⁴ In the institutional novel, according to Campe, the institution gives “Dauer” to the lives of individuals in a way that opposes the flux of development in the Bildungsroman; this permanence or durability – which depends, as Campe acknowledges, on the institution theories of a Gehlian philosophical anthropology – comes at a high cost: it frequently lapses into an artificial, semantically-empty repetition compulsion. The institution institutes over and over; its realization is simultaneously the bureaucratic nightmare of the perpetual *pro forma*, the self-reflexive irony of which is captured by Kafka’s and Walser’s bleak institutional novels. But in *Der Gehülfe*, this logic takes on a kind of division of labor, a split between performance and invention. Crucial, then, to Walser’s Leistungsroman is how the institution organizes and reinforces the division between engineer and clerk, invention and *Leistung* but also the question of whether the Leistungen of the clerical assistant can be institutionalized after the demise of the institution proper (the household economy); or whether, instead, the clerk finds himself once again at a different institution: the “Schreibstube für Stellungslose.”²⁵

Walser’s shift in institutional framework is, moreover, what enables the specific nexus of performance and technical invention that characterizes Walser’s Leistungsroman as a particularly reified version of the modern novel. Walser’s novel does not confront what in his *Theorie des Romans* Georg Lukács’ calls ‘the bad infinity’ of the novel with the biographical form of a ‘hero’s life – a form which for Lukács is meant to coordinate and order, i.e. to form, the “diskrete

²⁴ This is ironic in the specific sense in which Campe defines the irony of the institution: the way, in the sense of philosophical anthropology, the institution compensates for the human being’s fundamental lack by furnishing artifice in the place of human “Wesen.” “Sie kann das nur, indem sie das prinzip des Kunstersatzes auf sich selbst anwendet. Die Institution ist unaufhörliche Selbstersetzung durch Kunst.” Campe, “Kafkas Institutionenroman,” 200.

²⁵ On the institution of the *Schreibstube für Stellungslose* in Walser as part of a poetics of the welfare state see Roloff, *Der Stellenlose*.

Grenzlosigkeit des Romanstoffes,” empirical life, by anchoring the extensivity of life in the protagonist’s “Werdegang.”²⁶ Instead, *Der Gehülfe* turns the life course of its hero into a literal curriculum vitae: it bookends Joseph’s life with his ‘position’ or “Anstellung” as assistant in the Tobler house, a position that begins on the first page of the novel at 8 A.M. on a Monday morning and ends, on the last page of the novel, with Joseph’s departure from the Tobler office, unpaid at that. The formal problem of the novel is, perhaps, provisionally solved at the price of its absolute reification: if, for Lukács, the individual human life becomes, as the stuff of the novel, a “mere instrument” for the novel’s formal imperative of making life meaningful (“wesenhaft”), the life of Walser’s protagonist becomes an aid (*Gehilfe*) to the economy of (novelistic) invention. Walser’s Leistungsroman is thus fully reified prose, prose in which the central trope of the modern novel, as Lukács expresses it – less than a decade after Walser and with the same publisher, as Campe has noted – is taken literally economic face-value: “So objektiviert sich die formbestimmende Grundgesinnung des Romans als Psychologie der Romanhelden: sie sind Suchende” (Lukács, 58). Walser’s Leistungsroman folds in the distance traversed by Lukács from his *Theorie des Romans* to his *Geschichte und Klassenbewusstsein*, from transcendental homelessness to reification: seeking, in Walser, is a “Stellensuche” – and retaining a position, as the formerly unemployed (“stellenlos”) Joseph Marti knows, depends upon meeting the imperative of performance: “etwas zu leisten” (Walser, 147).²⁷ The success of

²⁶ Georg Lukács, *Theorie des Romans*, 80.

²⁷ On the consequences of the *Stelle* and being *stellenlos* in Walser see Jason Groves, “Unbecoming Furniture” and Simon Roloff, *Der Stellenlose*. Elke Siegel’s is one of the earliest studies to address the implications of *Stellungslosigkeit* for Walser’s writing. See Siegel, *Aufträge aus dem Bleistiftsgebiet*. Walser’s novel frequently addresses the precarity of the *Angestellter*: “Beim Antritt der Stellung war ihm bereits lebhaft der Austritt aus derselben vor Augen getreten” (22). The metaphysics of the novel’s search for position in life is thus turned outward in Walser: it becomes gainful employment. The trope of homelessness that Lukács theory of the novel famously cites was not lost on Walser’s readers. As Werner Weber notes in a review in 1955, Walser’s novel is an “uncanny idyll” that dramatizes “Obdachlosigkeit als Schicksal” through the story of a house that “slowly ceases to be one.” The homelessness of the

invention in the novel – both on the thematic level of the development and financing of the engineer’s technical inventions in the novel and on the metapoetological level of novelistic invention which the former figures – depends upon this imperative.

The Techne of Leistung

Far more than parlance, the term *Leistung* in Walser’s novel circumscribes an entire spectrum of job-related tasks, from what the clerk writes to what his achievements or merits in the workplace, in short: his job performance.²⁸ Moreover *Leistung* transposes the materiality of writing (as a coordinated exercise between hand, head, and instrument) onto the division of labor between engineer and assistant, inventor and clerk: the engineer invents, the clerk (mindlessly) performs.

Leistung is a nebulous word. Situated between common parlance and a technical term, it seems to supply a general metrics or schema for what counts as socially significant, economically optimal, technologically, biologically, or athletically impressive, but also seems unable to decide between quantity and quality. In *Eros and Civilization* Herbert Marcuse names the performance principle the “prevailing historical form of the *reality principle*.”²⁹ For Marcuse the *Leistungsprinzip* historicizes Freud’s reality principle by feeding the psychoanalyst’s basic

protagonist is, as Weber notes, not only metaphysical but corresponds as a mood or “*Stimmung*” to a “*Obdachlosigkeit der Form*.” This formal homelessness entails a revision and renewal of the novel’s project of providing a “home” or lifeworld amenable to human life. Werner Weber, *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, no. 1956, July 23, 1955, quoted in Greven’s afterword to *Der Gehülfe*, 306.

²⁸ The valences of the German word *Leistung* cover far more semantic ground than the English ‘performance.’ The Grimm Dictionary ties the German “*Leistung*” to the fulfillment of a (legal or monetary) obligation or indebtedness, even a pledge or delivery of something promised, in the sense of the latin *praestatio* (guarantee, warranty, payment), *exhibitio* (delivery, hand-out) *complementum* (completion or fulfillment), *effectio* (achieving, performing, doing); and also to demonstrating an ability or particular accomplishment, and, more generally, to denoting an action (“*das verbum tritt . . . theils im ursprünglichen scharfen sinne, mit betonung der verpflichtung, theils in einem abgeschwächten, mit bloszer hervorhebung einer thätigkeit auf . . .*”). “*Leistung*” in *Deutsches Wörterbuch* von Jacob und Wilhelm Grimm, (Leipzig: S. Hirzel, 1854-1961), cols. 726-727.

²⁹ Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, 35.

premise of the reality principle – “the fact of Ananke or scarcity” – through a historical narrative of the division of labor and a “specific *organization* of scarcity.” Performance, then, in Marcuse’s sense, is what happens when “work has now become general” and “libido is diverted for socially useful performances in which the individual works for himself only insofar as he works for the apparatus, engaged in activities that mostly do not coincide with his own faculties and desires.” In Walser, too, *Leistung* designates a certain version of the reality principle but not exactly in the sense of sublimation towards the socially-useful. *Leistung*, as will be discussed below, is also a way of getting by under the conditions of working for someone else, of being ‘engaged in activities’ that, as Marcuse puts it, “do not coincide with [one’s] faculties and desires.” In this scenario, of “work[ing] for an apparatus which [one] does not control” (Marcuse, 45), Walser will imagine *Leistung* as both an alienated activity and one that might lead somewhere else.

Leistung in Walser also raises the question of a metric for regulating and gauging the productivity or efficacy of the clerical worker; but it also applies to the technical inventions he works on and even to the literary author and the literary invention. The German *Leistung* denotes a human activity or accomplishment, a service rendered as obligation as much as it marks the performance of a machine, invention, or device.³⁰ As Walser would have known, performance principle attempts to suture the value of a given work – whether written advertisement, technical invention, or novel form – to its own metric of achievement, merit, and effectiveness, a metric that in turn is always tied to a market-derived notion of (marginal) value: the market for venture capital, the market for a given invention or the patent market, the book market. What counts as performance or *Leistung* in each of these various value spheres differs but the value attached to these “Leistungen” is in every case linked to a notion of invention and innovation.

³⁰ See Lars Distelhorst, *Leistung: Das Endstadium der Ideologie*.

Central to how Walser's novel of performance (re)writes the value form of modern literature is the way in which it interjects a bit of the history of technology into the history of the novel, or, put otherwise, how it imagines the production of the novel as part of the history and economy of technological invention. This is not simply because of the historical realism of *Der Gehülfe*: the fact that the novel turns Walser's work as clerical assistant for the actual inventor and engineer Carl Dubler into literature, incorporating the language of patent in its descriptions of the advertising clock or the ammunition vending machine (of which actual patents are registered in the name of Carl Dubler with the Swiss Federal Institute for Intellectual Property),³¹ and protocolling the difficulties in securing reliable investment capital. Walser's *Leistungsroman* reactualizes and alters a critical moment in the history of technology, a moment that sees the linking of technological invention and human performance. In his idiosyncratic tendency to identify key moments of modernity (pre)figured in the middle ages, Blumenberg suggests that this relation between *Leistung* and invention appears first in the writings of Nicolas von Cusa. In Blumenberg's account, Nicolas von Cusa's figure of the *idiot*, the non-scholastic and humble handworker, is engaged in a mode of production, a *techne* or *ars* that prefigures the radical break with the imitation of nature principle that will later come to define late 18th-century aesthetics. Blumenberg reads Cusa's figure of the idiot, a spoonmaker, as an illustration of precisely what is at stake in the principle of the imitation of nature, namely "die Frage, was der Mensch in der Welt und an der Welt aus seiner Kraft und Fertigkeit leisten könne." The spoonmaker, in this context, comes to a novel conception of production not in a scene of inspiration but through the lowly craft of his spoonmaking: his invention of the spoon is something absolutely new, which

³¹ In a moment of historical irony, Dubler's patents were processed in the same office in which Albert Einstein worked as an evaluator of patents for numerous such inventions at the same time [1903] that Carl Dubler submitted his patents. Did Einstein, the modern myth of invention, evaluate Dubler's patents?

no *exemplar* precedes. In this regard, the spoonmaker's art is a *techne* that becomes invention, one that radically adjusts the cosmological position and self-understanding of humans. The example of the spoonmaker, Blumenberg writes, points to a "neue Prägung des Menschen, der sich selbst aus dem heraus versteht und seine Geltung rechtfertigt, was er tut und kann." In this sense then, Blumenberg can claim: "Der historisch keineswegs selbstverständliche Verbund von Leistung und Selbstbewußtsein ist an dem cusanischen *Idiota* greifbar, und zwar gerade in der Hinsicht, die uns hier beschäftigt." In the case of the spoonmaker, *Leistung* is a form of being, a form of life, and a *praxis* that can become inventive.³²

Clerical Fehlleistung

To be sure, there is precedence in the history of the modern novel for something like the *Leistungsroman*. Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* offers an early possible prototype for the novel of performance, particularly in its link between Crusoe's ingenuity as an average human and his sense of self-determining accomplishment, the self-affirmation he experiences in his craftiness; the connection, however, that Crusoe makes between performance and invention, while it inaugurates a scene of *Leistung* in the modern novel, differs greatly from the clerk, who because of the division of labor between invention and performance knows only the latter.

As Crusoe – the archetypal *homo faber* – remarks at one point in the novel, "... I think I was never more vain of my own performance, or more joyful for anything I found out, than for my being able to make a Tobacco-Pipe."³³ This comment comes at a moment in the first novel when, after coming to terms with his fate on the island, Crusoe resolves to improve himself in the "mechanical exercises" that furnish his island-stranded existence. Unlike the "necessities"

³² For a more detailed discussion of the spoonmaker as an example of *Leistung* in Blumenberg, see my forthcoming article "Blumenbergs Idiot."

³³ Daniel Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe*, 122.

that Crusoe crafts to aid in or secure his survival, the pipe is an object whose sole purpose lies in how it “exceedingly comforted” Crusoe as someone who “had been always used to a smoke.” Like Crusoe, an ordinary British mariner, the pipe is nothing extraordinary, but by importing the comfort of habitual British life to the minimal setting of the island it becomes a marker of extraordinary inventiveness, of a performance irreducible to the resourcefulness that otherwise characterizes Crusoe. The pipe and the vanity in performance its “Invention” invites are not merely incidental or circumstantial to Crusoe’s autobiographical “Strange Suprising Adventures” but could be seen as what enable the autobiographical, novelistic account of his life in the first place. For only in the context of this performance – which emanates from what Crusoe calls his “Invention” and “Contrivance” - does “the story of a private man’s Adventures” become, as Defoe’s preface suggests, “worth making Publick.” In the scene of invention Crusoe’s ordinary life as an everyday mariner becomes the wondrous stuff of the novel, indeed its invention, “exceed[ing] all . . . that is to be found extant.” This is the case not because the pipe is a wondrous object - Crusoe in fact dubs it a “very ugly, clumsy thing” - but because the pipe signals Crusoe’s ability to make the impossible possible: if earlier the tobacco pipe was something he “fain would have” but which “was impossible . . . to make,” Crusoe “found a Contrivance for that too, at last.”

Performance, as Crusoe experiences it, thus comes from an inventiveness that is not the offspring of necessity, as the conventional trope would have it, but which exceeds the brute necessity of the island. Within the economy of Defoe’s novel, as itself also a founding myth of political economy, Crusoe’s performance with the invention of a tobacco pipe falls out of the calculus of labor and leisure time that otherwise, as Marx famously suggests, characterizes Crusoe as a ‘good Englander’ who in the manner of the bookkeeper “keeps account of himself”

(*Capital*). As an object that does not fall within the inventory of necessary things Crusoe devises for his survival (since its purpose is solely in comforting Crusoe), nor elicit one of Crusoe's pervasive religious meditations on the work of "Providence" in his adventure, the pipe and its scene of invention marks the point at which the novel moves beyond a tale of adventurous survival or religious conversion (the predominant topoi of the early novel), or of contingency or order, to become the autobiographical account of a protagonist that does things for the sole purpose of performance and wherein the invention of the novel coincides with invention in the novel. (i.e. where Crusoe's excogitations - the stuff of his autobiography - become a fictional novel).

Though Defoe's novel lays some of the foundation for Walser's *Leistungsroman* – the turn to an ordinary character, the trope of self-accounting (a major pastime of Walser's bookkeeping clerks and he protagonist of *Der Gehülfe*), the relation between invention and performance – *Robinson Crusoe* couldn't be farther than Walser's clerical novel. Crusoe's story of performance, even as it marks what in the novel exceeds a story of survival, participates in a trajectory of personal and literary development (beyond the 'middle State, or what might be called the upper Station of Low Life' promoted by Crusoe's father) which must be utterly foreign to Walser's clerks who experience neither joy nor vanity in invention and indeed have been severed from the act of inventing altogether. The unity of invention and performance in *Robinson Crusoe* – imperative for the grounding of Crusoe as a figure of modern individualism, as Ian Watt has argued – belongs the "Selbstbewusstsein" that Blumenberg attributes to the spoonmaker. By the time one reaches Walser's clerks, this "Selbstbewusstsein" has all but evaporated.

While Crusoe and Blumenberg's idiot offer two archetypes of Walser's *Leistungs*-obsessed clerks, there are stark differences: whereas both Robinson and the layman combine performance

and invention, for Walser's clerks this option is structurally unavailable: the division of labor between clerk and engineer, or clerk and boss effects a division between the *techne* of Leistung and that of invention.

The classic figure of performance in Walser is always the assistant or clerk whose employment prospects – and *Anstellung* – often depend upon job performance. Sometimes, the figure of the clerical assistant feels underchallenged by the demands on their performance, like Simon Tanner, the protagonist of Walser's first novel, *Geschwister Tanner*, who quits his position as an assistant at a bookstore after eight days, disappointed with a "Beschäftigung" that he feels doesn't suit his talents and feeling as if he "kann ganz anderes leisten" as that which is demanded of him (*Geschwister Tanner*, 16). Other times the figure of the clerk takes his job performance very seriously, working "langsam, Zahl für Zahl, Buchstabe für Buchstabe, richtig, gesetzt, leidenschaftslos, wie es sich schickt vor einer Leistung, die keine Anforderungen an die Begabung stellt."³⁴ And other times still, the clerk struggles with his own performance and feels the wrath of a boss or manager who finds the worker's performance to be lacking. This is the story of Helbing, one of Walser's recurring clerical figures.

A short text published in the same year that Walser drafted *Der Gehülfe*, dramatizes Helbing's inability to perform by slowly narrating, nearly minute by minute, a Monday morning from 8:10 AM to 11:58 AM in the bookkeeping department of the bank in which Helbing works. In the eyes of his colleagues, Helbing is a "Muster der natürlichen Ungeduld" (*Im Bureau*, 38), astoundingly slow and prone to wasting time at work, when he should be writing, with pastimes such as twirling his mustache, bending over as if to tie his shoe (and not actually tying it), or comparing the time on his pocketwatch to that of the wall clock in the comptoir. In a scene

³⁴ Walser, "Das Buebli," in *Im Bureau*, 38.

remarkably similar to the scene of performance between boss and employee in *Der Gehülfe*, Helbing is reprimanded by his boss for his miserable “Leistung” (29), a mere “drei Zahlen” that take Helbing an entire hour. Helbing’s inability to perform his job adequately is noted not only by his superior, who sits at a “quasi Aussichtsturm” (27) to monitor the employees of the bookkeeping department, but also by his colleagues who, after Helbing steps outside for a short break, gather around the latter’s desk to gawk at Helbing’s inefficiency.

If the clerk is the figure par excellence of performance in Walser – precisely because performance is the crux of the clerk’s job description – Helbing’s inefficiency demonstrates all the ambivalences, difficulties, and problems that the imperative to perform brings with it for the clerk’s position in both workplace and world. For Walser’s clerical workers, performing well on the job is frequently measured by both the precision and accuracy of the clerk’s calculations, by punctuality and a conscientious sense of purpose, as well as by the speed with which the clerk can compose the greatest amount of numbers/statements/record sheets.³⁵ The clerk’s performance is tied to a kind of literary arithmetic that is always monitored, checked, disturbed and reinforced by the gaze of the boss but that also reflects the inner disposition of the clerk: “Ein guter Rechner und Haushalter ist der Commis ohne allen Zweifel [. . .] Ein guter Rechner ist meistens ein guter Menschen, das beweist ein Commis zehnmal im Tag” (“Der Commis,” *Im*

³⁵ In part, this notion of performance aligns with concepts of “Leistung” that see it as a rationalization of the workplace; this notion of “Leistung” is central to Max Weber’s giant economic study in the first two decades of the twentieth century *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*, in which the central analytic term is “Nutzleistung.” Walser’s notion of performance allows, by contrast, for an irrational response to the performance imperative; In an entirely rationalized system of clerical work, in which the thirteen minutes Helbing spends outside “getting fresh air” are noted precisely, Helbing’s inefficiency would be chastised as irrational timewasting but Helbing uses his time more rationally than any of his colleagues, squeezing the most amount of time-wasting out of every minute on the clock while still performing enough to retain his position, at least for a while.

Bureau, 15).³⁶ However, the clerk's link between economic prowess and moral virtue begins to break down when the demands on the clerk's job performance become too stringent. For the clerk's numerous virtues – these include, as Walser lists them, diligence shyness, loyalty, flexibility, tact, naiveté, modesty, extraordinarily averageness, and docility – frequently fail to translate into the kind of performance expected of the clerk by the principle or boss.

In the case of Helbing, for instance, a clerical proclivity to mediocrity and working prevents Helbing from getting anything done at all.³⁷ As Helbing puts it in his autobiographic account of himself – a story he narrates himself since, as he notes, “sonst wahrscheinlich von niemandem aufgeschrieben würde”³⁸ – “Es ist jedenfalls ein Hemmnis, das mich hindert, mich

³⁶ In *Der Gehülfe* the gaze of the boss extends to the entire household/oikos; even the gaze of the boss' children and wife question the clerk's position within the household/family/life: “Diese ungeniert fragenden und forschenden Blicke entmutigten ihn. Solche Blicke erinnern eben an die Angeflogenheit an etwas Fremdes, an die Behäbigkeit dieses Fremden, das für sich eine Heimat darstellt, und an die Heimatlosigkeit desjenigen, der nun so dasitzt und die Pflicht hat, sich möglichst rasch und guten Willens in das behagliche fremde Bild heimatlich einzufügen. Solche Blicke machen einen frieren im heißesten Sonnenschein, sie dringen kalt in die Seele, bleiben da einen Moment kalt liegen und verlassen sie wieder, wie sie gekommen sind” (*Der Gehülfe*, 13).

³⁷ Helbing's character as a “übertrieben gewöhnlicher Mensch” is undermined by his rather exceptional proclivity to arrive late to work, attract attention through his ostentatious and disruptive time-wasting strategies. Helbing's self-description of his averageness seems to ironize a notion of averageness that translates the classical notion of a golden mean into a modern understanding of the statistical average: “Ich bin mittelgroß von Gestalt und habe deshalb Gelegenheit, mich zu freuen, darüber, dass ich weder hervorstechend klein, noch herausplatzend groß bin. Ich habe so das Maß, wie man auf schriftdeutsch sagt.” “Helbing's Geschichte” in *Im Bureau*, 55. The irony lies in Helbing's self-undermining statement: “Das Hervorstechende an mir, ist, dass ich ein ganz, beinahe übertrieben gewöhnlicher Mensch bin” – precisely Helbing's averageness is what is so conspicuously unaverage about him. Helbing's obsessive averageness turns then into a kind of exceptionality. On the problem of this conspicuous inconspicuousness in Walser and Kracauer see Ethel Matala de Mazza, “Angestelltenverhältnisse. Sekretäre und ihre Literatur” in *Europa. Kultur der Sekretäre*. Kracauer approaches the conspicuous inconspicuousness of the average salaried masses of clerks and other white-collared employees with recourse to Poe's purloined letter, opting for a constructionist method to capture the normality (and quotidian status, a related but slightly different inflection of the averageness problem) of the clerk that abandons the reportage – typically employed for the representation of everyday life – in favor an exotic mosaic. What Walser's and Kracauer's clerks have in common is an inconspicuous mediocrity and nondescript commonness that simultaneously renders them invisible and the object of singular observation. In many ways the ambivalence of the clerk's job performance stems from the lack of clarity as to what precisely constitutes “Leistung.”

³⁸ Walser, “Helbing's Geschichte” in *Im Bureau*, 55.

auszuzeichnen, denn wenn ich beispielsweise einen Auftrag erledigen soll so besinne ich mich immer erst eine halbe Stunde, manchmal auch eine ganze!” (“Helbing’s Geschichte,” 56). Indeed, it is precisely when Helbing feels most “obligated” to perform that he fails to do so. On the one hand, his work demands too little of his mind – and of his mind’s capacity for excessive deliberation; on the other hand, it demands far too much. Paradoxically, though, Helbing’s “exaggerated averageness,” as he puts it, is what allows him to excel and distinguish himself from the rest of his colleagues in a different kind of occupation, a different sort of performance: wasting time. When Helbing’s boss reprimands him for performing too poorly on the job, Helbing draws out the conversation, argues back, makes excuses, “damit ich das Gespräch mit ihm [seinem Chef] ein wenig in die Länge ziehen kann, vielleicht eine halbe Stunde, dann ist doch wiederum eine halbe Stunde verstrichen, während deren Verlauf ich mich wenigstens nicht gelangweilt habe” (59). Helbing’s job performance doesn’t consist in accomplishing anything (“Ich vollbringe so wenig, daß ich selber von mir denke: ‘Wirklich, du vollbringst nichts!’”) but in reflecting on and avoiding boredom; his pastime at work is to pass time.

Yet Helbing’s occupational boredom is not simply the opposite of performing well on the job;³⁹ the economy of Helbing’s time-management still sits squarely within, even as it tests, irritates, and rebuts, the imperative to perform. Drawing a connection between time and money, Hans Blumenberg writes in his essay on Georg Simmel’s *Philosophy of Money*, that the time devoted to pastimes “ist nicht gemessene Zeit; wer sich die Zeit vertreibt, entfernt sich von den

³⁹ The paradox that Karl Marx noted in Ricardo’s theory of labor – namely that slow workers don’t produce more surplus value even if they require more labor time for a given productive task – is Helbing’s performance paradox but also his test of the employment relationship. Can one be a poet of his time? Can one sleep on the clock? Can sleep be a *Leistung* that the firm remunerates? Can an employee perform without accomplishing?

Uhren, den er hat Zeit, um sie sich zu vertreiben”.⁴⁰ The logic of the pastime, Blumenberg writes, is similar to that of money: one saves time and money in order to spend or pass it; and at its absolute limit this economy would entail a situation, Blumenberg suggests, in which one is able to spend time and money without any regard whatsoever for what one is spending (time/money); a kind of infinite expenditure that no longer corresponds to its opposite, namely, the finite effort involved in procuring money and time.⁴¹ To be sure, in his own way Walser does play with this limit fantasy in narratives that imagine Helbing having a “pile of money” so large he would never have to work again. Or, in a move that drives this pathological logic to its extreme, one prose piece imagines how one of Helbing’s favorite work pastimes – sleeping in and showing up late – leads to a situation in which “kein Helbing mehr zu spät zur Arbeit an[langte]” and in which Helbing could “so lange liegen bleiben als es ihm behagte” because his frequent tardiness leads to his dismissal from his job (89-90). But far more usual than this sort of paradoxical possibility of exiting temporal and monetary economies altogether – of exiting the economy of the performance imperative and the necessity of working to live – is the way Helbing goes about his pastime *within* the constraints of his job description and demands, the way he turns his use of time at work into its own sort of “Leistung.” Helbing doesn’t enjoy his pastime because it allows him to forget or banish time altogether; Helbing, in fact, obsesses over the clock, constantly checking his pocketwatch and turning this gesture into its own, literal pastime (“Jeder Schlag, den das Werk macht, wird von einem Seufzer aus Helblings Mund begleitet.” “Ich sollte eigentlich nicht soviel auf die Uhr schauen, das kann nicht gesund sein,”

⁴⁰ “Geld oder Leben,” 185. Blumenberg calls this relationship between money and time the “Pathologie des Geldes” and refers here to the “scheinbar absurde Verklammerung von Erwerb und Verschwendung, die bei der Zeit als Anstrengung des Zeitgewinns und Bedenkenlosigkeit des Zeitvertreits auftritt” (185).

⁴¹ In this vein, Hannah Arendt critically notes that this modern notion of spare time, i.e. the time saved from laboring, has little left of its predecessor in the ancient concept of *skhole*. See Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 131, no. 84.

denkt er;” or in words of a colleague observing Helbing observing his clock: “Ist das nicht eine Schande, wie jetzt der Helbing wieder seine Zeit totschrägt”[28]). Unlike Blumenberg’s time-passer whose surplus of time to spend allows for the luxurious banishment of time altogether, Helbing enjoys his pastime only in the presence of the clock, which, after all, confirms that time is passing. Thus, it’s not so much that, while on the clock, Helbing doesn’t perform what is asked of him with these pastimes (he does, after all, compose three numbers). Rather, Helbing performs something slightly different than what is asked of him while trying to pass this performance off as the “Leistung” proper to his job.

Helbing’s performance has, in other words, the structure of what Freud, writing during the same time Walser is drafting his sketch of the clerk, calls a *Fehlleistung*, which in its most basic form involves faultily delivering one thing in place of something else (intended). While Helbing does not commit any of the classically Freudian unconscious linguistic slips – and indeed little about Helbing’s behavior seems to suggest any disclosure of the unconscious – there is a pathological consistency to how Helbing performs or accomplishes something that is almost always amiss or *fehl* vis-à-vis what is demanded of his time on the clock. And his response to his boss who irritably inquires, yet again, “what are you doing there?” approximates the linguistic confusion of the slip, a confusion that arises not because Helbing misspeaks when he replies, “Ich bin jetzt am ‘Ausland’-Zusammenstellen,” but because of his boss’s (analytic) play on a colloquialism: “Ich glaube, Sie sind eher im Ausland als am ‘Ausland’-Zusammenstellen.” Moreover, like Freud’s parapraxis, Helbing’s misperformances are almost always followed by a kind of excuse: “Er habe den guten Willen gehabt, zu arbeiten, aber wenn er keine rechten Federn mehr habe, so sei es schwer, vorwärts zu kommen.” What Helbing’s boss calls his “sad excuses [faule Ausreden]” function, indeed, like the excuses of someone who has committed a

parapraxis. The crucial difference is, of course, that Helbing's behavior is not unconscious. In this regard, clerical parapraxis is not a symptom but an attempt at appropriation: a mis-performing of *Fehl-Leistung* that isn't a moment of truth or revealing but a willful resistance with the same *Wiederholungszwang*.

With his deeply ironic sketch of the clerk, Walser makes the *Fehlleistung* the structure wherein the clerk becomes poet or novelistic hero, even as he remains clerk:⁴² this *Fehlleistung*, which borrows from but doesn't perfectly overlap with Freud's, entails marks a kind of using time that originates in the performance imperative of the workplace but becomes the condition of possibility for poetry. Instead of clerical performance, the clerk delivers poetry, which draws on and uses the resources of the job for a different purpose, refunctionalizes writing, time on the clock, and the "Leistung" of the job as the *Fehlleistung* of the literary.

In Walser, this clerical *Fehlleistung* is linked specifically to the clerk's use of time, whose fate is to find himself constantly unemployed (also and paradoxically because of their parapraxes) and in search of work, a time of waiting, of pastimes, of boredom: "What do unemployed clerks do? They wait! They wait for a new position, and while they wait they are tormented by remorse, which accuses them in the coldest tone of voice." While a self-accusatory remorse issues as negative consequence out of the clerk's internalized imperative to perform, the constitutive *Fehlleistung* of the clerk delivers something else. In this waiting time the

⁴² This, one could argue, is also what Kafka called the "schlechte Karriere" of Simon Tanner. Many interpret Kafka's phrase as indicative of clerical careers gone awry in Walser (Grove: awry in sense of careering out of control, a non-positionality mirrored in the mobility of Walser's Spaziergang; Kreienbrock: a career that isn't simply an inversion of the straight path of *Bildung*, the path towards perfected mastery – i.e. not a negative theology of failure -- "characterizations such as good and complete are not simply sublated/cancelled or entirely dispelled; but the continuum that stretches between pupil and master, the line which traditionally would provide orientation to a becoming artist becomes brittle [need better translation]"); but the feat or art of the bad career is to find the margin between what passes as job performance and what constitutes mis-performance; The bad careers of Walser's clerks are still careers, and still follow a performance principle.

unemployed clerk makes poetry: ““Dieser Commis fing an, aus verzehrender Langeweile Gedichte zu schreiben, und er hat deren einige schöne gemacht. Er war eine feine, empfindliche Seele. Ob er jetzt Stellung hat? Nein, er hat sich neuerdings aus der neuen Stellung gestrichen, so blöde und unklug ist er. Es muß eine Art Krankheit bei ihm sein, daß er es nirgends aushalten kann, und einige, die Einsicht in derlei Sachen haben, sagen ihm ein schlimmes Ende voraus” (“Der Commis,” *Im Bureau*, 18). As Jason Groves has pointed out for this clerical/literary writer in Walser, “clerical activity (‘Abschreiben’) can support a literary activity (‘Schreiben’) in a symbiotic form” through “furnishing material – a scene of writing – but not the actual writing – and by being so unengaging that this other writing . . . may emerge. The work of ‘Abschreiben’ must become a write-off for a waiting that, in turn, will never bring in a steady income. Proper literary work originates in the space and time opened up by a vacated position.”⁴³

Helbing – and Walser, too – shows that a kind of literary work is possible within the performance demands of clerical employment. Even as this work will always be *fehl* with regards to formal job performance it nevertheless lays claim to compensation; Helbing: “Ich denke gar nicht, daran, mir zu sagen, daß ich nicht einmal so viel verdiene mit meinen Leistungen” (); but still, I know I achieve just about nothing.” An achievement, a Leistung, that is *just about* nothing – still more than nothing – but deserves to be better compensated – what Helbing imagines here only obliquely (by vocalizing what he purports *not* to bethinking about) is the margin in which a clerical literature becomes possible that originates not in the idleness or passivity of non-work (which in Schlegel’s famous “Idyll on Idleness” becomes the locus *par*

⁴³ See Groves, “Unbecoming Furniture: Robert Walser’s Ergonomics.” Groves essay shares many of the premises and foci of this chapter but differs insofar as what Groves identifies as the law of work in Walser, his ergo-nomos, which, Grove argues, “develops out of, and in response to, the neglect of ergonomic principles in the workplace,” more strongly emphasizes the symbiosis of clerical and literary writing as an aporia in Walser (quoting Siegel, Walser’s ‘Stellenloses Oeuvre’ is, Groves suggests, ‘a writing that can take place only by taking leave from writing’).

excellence of literature: “What is essential to [all art and science] is thought and poetry and that is only possible through passivity”) but in the performance imperative of the *comptoir*; this is a clerical literature that coopts the *form* of work for a poetic activity that otherwise is not sanctioned as proper performance.

In other words, qua misperformance, this is a literature that is continuous with clerical performance insofar as it is conceived as a kind of usage: a usage of time, a usage of instruments; but one that becomes literature through a discontinuity in the substance of what is performed. The clerk becomes a poet not so much because he writes *poems* – Grove is right here in suggesting that the clerical activity of *Abschreiben* does not furnish the actual writing for the literary activity of *Schreiben*. Indeed, it’s not by virtue of the substance of the clerk’s activity, which is often the banal work of bookkeeping, but rather because the clerk’s performance works on the *form* of this usage, that is, on *how* bookkeeping does or doesn’t get done, on how its techniques might be transported to other writing scenes, etc.. As will be discussed later in the context of Walser’s so-called pencil method, becoming an artist for Walser is not a matter of literary stuff but of literary technique and disposition (patience), in short, a matter of “Leistung” as Blumenberg understands it: as a kind of *techne* that shifts the valuation of human doing (a handiwork that becomes invention; a ‘Demut’ that becomes ‘Hochmut’).

In this regard, Walser capitalizes on his clerical performance: he turns the skills required of his job description, via a kind of *Fehlleistung*, into literary ones. This basic structure of a clerical writing scene that can but must not necessarily turn into a literary one, this conflation of the clerical and literary haunts Walser as a writer exceedingly familiar with the precarity of a literary career in which an author’s words stand under the dictates of a book market but also as a clerical writer who frequently moved between short-term jobs in banks, offices and proto-

unemployment offices, so-called “Schreibstube für Stellenlose” where the unemployed literate could put writing skills to work. At the desk, whether in the “Schreibstube” for the unemployed, in the comptoir of a firm, or at home, the imperative to perform can cripple or enable writing that knows little boundary between the literary and the clerical. It is in this context that, as Walser suggests in his early sketch on the clerk, the feather of the exacting and calculating bookkeeper can morph into that of the poet:

The feather of an upstanding clerk is usually quite pointy, sharp, and vicious . . . A diligent clerk hesitates for a few moments when putting feather to paper . . . Then he fires away and . . . letters, words, sentences fly . . . and every sentence gracefully expresses very much. . . In rapid pace he invents linguistic constructions that would amaze many a scholarly professor . . . Immodest poets and scholars ought to gently follow his example.

Poetic inventiveness, Walser’s early sketch *Der Kommis* (1902) suggests here, is not opposed to the very economical and prosaic “world and sphere of activity” (“Welt und Wirkungsfeld”) of the clerk, namely the “narrow, slim, barren, dry office” with its mundane tasks such as business correspondence. In fact, the clerk’s poetry finds its proper if vexed place in Walser’s offices, where writing takes center stage and in which the feather and pencil, as potential instruments of the poet and clerk alike, sit alongside “all sorts of interest rate tables.” If the figure of the clerk in the office provides a model of literary excellence to poets and scholars, it is because, as Walser notes, the clerk is able to accurately keep account of “assets and liabilities” as much as “sensations and observations.” It isn’t simply the shift to the latter – the stuff of literature – that makes the clerk a poet, but the redirection of the clerical performance.⁴⁴ Against the poetry of the

⁴⁴ This suggests a different point of convergence of the clerical and the literary than for instance the one identified by Marc Shell, who suggests that the “same medium that seems to confer belief in fiduciary money (bank notes) and in scriptural money (created by the process of bookkeeping) also seems to confer it to literature. That medium is writing.” Shell, *Money, Language, Thought*, 7. For Shell, the relationship between symbol and thing that writing and language negotiate depends upon a kind of “[c]redit, or belief,” that is, in turn, the “very ground of aesthetic experience.” Just as bookkeeping raises questions about the symbolic value of a debit or credit noted on paper, literature questions the relation between

establishment – the immodest poets and scholars – Walser’s clerk turns his lowly *techne*, office work, into literature. Like in Blumenberg’s reading of Cusa’s idiot, here it is the craft of the layman clerk vis-à-vis the poet and scholar (in Cusa it’s an orator and philosopher, both scholastic) as a kind of *Leistung* that can – but must not necessarily – lead to inventiveness. The danger of the margin between *Leistung* and *Erfindung* here is that the craft can easily just remain office work or bad poetry, written while waiting for a job. The notion of the layman’s modest craft *Leistung* – as a usage of the instruments or apparatus, including the clock, that stand at the clerk’s disposal – lies at the heart of Walser’s own frequently-invoked self-description of his work: “Ich weiß, daß ich eine Art handwerklicher Romancier bin [. . .] Bin ich gut aufgelegt, d.h. bei guter Laune, so schneidere, schustere, schmiede, hoble, klopfe, hämmere oder nagele ich Zeilen zusammen, deren Inhalt man sogleich versteht ” (“Eine Art Erzählung”).⁴⁵ Inventiveness is here not the complex cogitations of the genius inventor or learned philosopher but the *plump* moods of the craftsman. The *Leistungs*-imperative thus frames the work of the clerk as much as it motivates literary writing in Walser as a kind of work that can hardly be cordoned off from the sort of workplace writing performed by Walser and his clerks. In this context, careful and diligent handwriting, a technique or skill central to the performance imperative becomes, for instance in Walser’s so-called ‘pencil method,’ an art that is inventive through rather than as the

“substance and sign.” In contrast to Shell’s semiological argument, Walser’s text seems to locate the convergence of the bookkeeping/administrative/economic world and the literary one at the level of material practice: the instruments, setting, and activity, in short, the writing scene, that both share and which, in both cases, is framed as a scene of performance.

⁴⁵ Walser’s frequent invocations of craftsmanship to figure his work as literary author belong to a long history of the relation between the mechanical and fine arts, from Plato’s elevation of the craftsman’s (*dēmiourgós*) production above the painter’s (*zōgráphos*) imitation in the tenth book of *The Republic*, to Kant’s explicit separation of craftsmanship from the beautiful arts in the *Critique of Judgment*, to the frequently cited topos of the poet as craftsman. Not incidentally, the engineer of *Der Gehülfe* is, among other things, an inventor of (advertising) clocks, perhaps an ironic citation of the topos of the “Uhrmacher” which in the deism debates among rationalists such as Wolff, Newton, and Leibniz is a crucial figure of creative invention.

opposition to *Leistung*.

„Schweiz“
Transport-Versicherungs-Gesellschaft
Zürich.

Aufstellung per 31. December 1896.

	Fr.	Cts.	Fr.	Cts.	Fr.	Cts.	Fr.	Cts.
	per 31. December 1895.				per 31. December 1896.			
Einnahmen:								
Gewinn- und Verlust-Conto	10,041.27				6,746.92			
Reserven	1,085,134.49				1,009,887.07			
Prämien	3,771,036.19				3,722,034.58			
Schaden-Rückvergütungen	1,644,305.37				1,473,089.16			
Sauvetagen	32,426.47				27,987.67			
Zinsen	86,136.75				79,858.23			
Actien-Uebertragungs-Gebühren								
Dividenden aus früh. Abschreibungen					1,669.25			
					4,349.44			
					19,106.55			
Total der Einnahmen:			6,629,080.54				6,318,546.97	
Ausgaben:								
Rückversicherungs-Prämien	50,78	1,924,971.94			62,28	1,946,237.53		
Schäden	77,32	3,183,351.47			81,22	2,927,131.27		
Provisionen		1,528,892.25				1,410,568.77		
Unkosten	22,72	2,698,081.14			24,11	2,833,830.42		
Abschreibungen		4,168.90				1,248.12		
Gewinnantheile								
Agio-Verlust		931.18						
Total der Ausgaben:			5,593,946.55				5,249,504.21	
Brutto-Ueberschuss:			1,035,133.99				1,069,042.76	
Reserven:								
Schwebende Schäden	578,500				627,550			
Reserve Extra-Vortrag für unbekannte Schäden	40,000				40,000			
Laufende Risiken	382,387.07				342,247.93			
Total:			1,000,887.07				1,014,797.93	
Netto-Ueberschuss:			99,246.92				57,244.83	

Figure 1. Walser hones his handwriting. A profits and loss statement from December 1896 likely drafted by Walser during his stint as an assistant bookkeeper for the transportation insurance company Schweiz. From *Robert Walser: Sein Leben in Bildern und Texten*.

Performance Anxiety

In *Der Gehülfe* the imperative of performance reaches from the lowest level of life, securing one's daily bread, to the highest, reflecting on who one actually is. The novel's protagonist clerk, Joseph Marti, not only worries about whether his performance will compensate for provisions he receives from his employer ("Werde ich diesen unverschämten Appetit durch entsprechende Leistungen rechtfertigen?") but also whether this performance will be enough to ontologically qualify him as more than nothing, as something vital or substantial in the first

place. As the narrator puts it in one of the many instances of indirect speech, used here to refract and vocalize the clerk's mental state: "Morgen früh würde es sich ja zeigen, ob er eine Kraft oder eine Null, eine Intelligenz oder eine Maschine, ein Kopf oder ein Hohlkopf sei" (15). Against another basic materialist maxim that one is what one eats, Walser's *Leistungsroman* plays with the idea that one is what one performs, to make up for what one eats: "Wer schon zu Mittag ißt, wie Joseph, muß diese durch verdoppelte Leistungen wieder gut zu machen suchen" (25). For the clerk in Walser's *Leistungsroman*, performance does not correspond to pay as in the schema of merit-based pay; indeed, Joseph never receives a full wage at all from his employer and in a manner typical for the clerk's playful, self-deprecating response to the demands on his performance, Joseph once remarks to his boss: "O, ich will gar keinen Gehalt. Ich verdiene ihn nicht." Rather, performance serves as a kind of existential justification for a constitutively precarious and constitutively subservient being, i.e. dependent upon the whims of a boss. Being, in Walser's novel – and this includes eating – is being ever able to perform whatever the boss demands of his employee, as Joseph remarks to his boss upon their first meeting: "Was mich betrifft, ich glaube und hoffe des Bestimmtesten, daß ich jederzeit dasjenige zu leisten imstande sein werde, was Sie glauben werden, von mir verlangen zu dürfen".

By linking the (ontological) question of what one is to what one performs, Walser's breaks not only with the Feuerbachian equation of eating and being but also with the materialist tenet according to which what one is coincides with one's productive activity. Despite being rooted in the performance demands of an employment relationship, the anxious connections Joseph draws between his job performance and "having a head," would only seem to point to a consciousness shaped by work, a consciousness that, as Marx and Engels write in their founding

text of historical materialism, is “nie etwas Andres [. . .] als das bewußte Sein,⁴⁶” rooted in an “wirklichen Lebensprozeß” of productively securing what is necessary to live. On the contrary, Joseph Marti is hardly a conscious being and never really engaged in an actual life-process (“ich bin zurückgeblieben im Leben,” he once remarks); never quite sure of what he does or who he is, Joseph only ever has what the narrator calls “Schluß-Bewusstsein” when he finally decides to stop working and leave his job at Tobler’s firm at the end of the novel. His job performance can thus hardly be described as a “certain type of activity” (“eine bestimmte Art der Tätigkeit”) – Marx and Engels’ definition of productive labor in *The German Ideology*. This sort of definite activity is unavailable for Joseph in an employment relationship that lacks definition altogether:

Die Obliegenheiten eines Angestellten liegen in einem solchen Haus weder ausdrücklich da noch ausdrücklich dort, sondern überall. Auch die Stunden der Pflichterfüllung sind keine exakt begrenzten, sondern erstrecken sich manchmal bis tief in die Nacht hinein, um bisweilen plötzlich mitten am Tag für eine Zeitlang aufzuhören.

Within this flexible topography and temporality of the workplace, under employment conditions that blur distinctions between free time and work, home and office, there is nothing exact or definite about Joseph’s work performance at all. Indeed, Joseph’s sphere of performance extends “everywhere,” far beyond the less than ample office desk at which he performs his clerical duties of drafting letters and advertisements in the service of Tobler’s ‘technical office’; in the Tobler household Joseph performs, for instance, as a gardener, a waiter, a boatsman, and in one case a personal scribe to his boss’ wife. The position or *Stellung* Joseph gains through the employment relationship is simultaneously deposed, *ent-stellt*, through the performance imperative that doesn’t assign definite tasks but places absolute ontological demands on the clerical employee’s flexible abilities. Performing as employee is thus not just what Joseph does to make a living but is that living *tout court*, a nervous form of life that constantly undermines the actions or

⁴⁶ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Die deutsche Ideologie*, 26.

“Leistungen” that are meant to legitimate and institute it in the first place; a form of life characterized by an impetuous worrying, a ‘headlessness’ that upsets all forward-looking biographies.

The depositioning or dispersion of the performance obligations of the clerk alter the institutional parameters, in Campe’s sense, in which Joseph is positioned: in a household that encompasses the private and the public, wherein “family and firm are situated in such immediate proximity that there is, as it were, physical contact,” the divisions which it is the task of the institution to enforce, between a restricted and a general economy, between the management of the household (*oikonomia*) and the art of getting rich (*chrematistike*), between work and play, (an incest taboo on the intermingling of family and firm) etc., collapse, altering too the shape of the protagonist’s life since it is the institution that provides stability/position and forms this life. In other words, the Tobler household is an institution that can never quite become or remain one, just as Joseph Marti’s life can never quite be formed into a sensible curriculum vitae. Like the school in Campe’s reading of Jakob von Gunten, the Tobler household is an institution that works on its own (self-realizing) unwinding by maximizing its institutional project, carrying it too far: “The institution disposes itself of the contents that – perhaps – were previously assigned to it, contents which the institution – perhaps – served to foster and propagate. What remains are exercises” (Campe, 242). The danger of the institution in *Der Gehülfe*, tied as it is to the economic imperative of performance, achievement, and realizing invention, is that it, too, can become reduced to such exercises, to a kind of headless performance of churning out advertisements, ideas, inventions that fail to lead in any real way to either the “head” the protagonist seeks to prove he has nor, semantically related, to the “capital” the engineer hopes to procure for his inventions.

One scene in particular in *Der Gehülfe* demonstrates how the clerical task becomes a headless exercise. As one of the few analeptic scenes of the novel, it describes a traumatic reprimand from his boss in Joseph's previous position in an elastic factory when Joseph's "hollow head" causes him to make an accounting mistake that costs the firm (the "Handelsgeschäft") "considerable harm." In this biographical episode the clerk's concern about "having a head" or being a "Hohlkopf," concerns that emanate from the imperative to perform, recasts the antithetical relation between mental and manual labor. In the scene, the imperative to perform a certain bookkeeping calculation leads to a collapse of any distinction between the work of the hand and the work of the head collapses, to a kind of discoordination:

Der Prinzipal machte Joseph eines Tages ganz gehörig herunter, ja, er machte ihn schlecht, er nannte ihn geradezu einen Betrüger, und weswegen? Das war auch wieder so eine *Kopfträchtigkeit* gewesen. Hohle Köpfe können ja nun allerdings einem Handelsgeschäft erheblichen Schaden zufügen. Man kann schlecht rechnen, oder aber, und das ist das Schlimme, *man rechnet einfach gar nicht*. Für Joseph war es so schwer gewesen, eine in englischer Pfundwährung aufgestellte Zinsenrechnung zu prüfen. Dazu fehlten ihm die paar Kenntnisse, und statt das nun offen dem Geschäftsherrn einzugestehen, wovor er sich schämte, setzte er unter die Rechnung, ohne sie wahrhaft geprüft zu haben, die lügnerische Bestätigung. Er schrieb mit Bleistift ein M zu der Schlußzahl, was so viel zu bedeuten hatte als die feste und ruhige Tatsache des Richtigbefundes. An diesem einen Tage nun kam es plötzlich durch eine mißtrauische Frage seitens des Prinzipals heraus, daß die Prüfung nur geschwindelt, und daß ja Joseph gar nicht imstande war, eine derartige Rechnung im Kopf zu lösen. Das waren eben englische Pfund, und Joseph wußte mit solchen absolut nicht umzugehen. Er verdiene, sprach der Vorgesetzte, mit Schimpf und Schande fortgejagt zu werden. Wenn er etwas nicht verstehe, so sei das keine Unehrenhaftigkeit, wenn er aber Verständnis lüge, so sei das *Diebstahl*. [. . .] O das war ein tobendes Herzklopfen für ihn gewesen. Er spürte eine schwarze, fressende Welle über seinem ganzen Dasein. [. . .] Er zitterte so heftig, daß die Zahlen, die er eben schrieb, nachher ungeheuerlich fremd, verschoben und groß aussahen (24-25) [italics mine].

Two different modes of *Leistung* break down here. On the one hand, *Leistung* marks the proper execution of a task that requires certain "Kenntnisse," a calculation. On the other hand, the scene depicts a *Fehl-Leistung* that does not move outside of the performance imperative altogether but continues to perform a headless, clerical work of the hand, signing off on the calculation in the

account book, the clerk performs beyond the proper performance demand placed on him until “Leistung” becomes a response and continuation, almost an automatism, of the performance imperative in spite of itself. It is only with the boss’s stern rebuke that even the performances of the clerk’s hand are deformed and become estranged and the being of the clerk threatened. The institution in which the performance imperative is operative knows misperformance, or the lack of the necessary conditions for performance altogether, only as “Diebstahl;” here, Joseph’s signing-off on his *Fehl-Leistung* is a compensatory gesture that ultimately fails. Joseph Marti’s curriculum vita, insofar as one can speak of a course of life at all for a character who imagines himself “zurückgeblieben im Leben,” is thus determined in large parts not by adequate performance but by these sorts of errors and mental lapses, which performance anxiety produces in the workplace.

By cancelling any reliable pathways between doing and being or performance and consciousness, the performance imperative not only questions the schema of development that grounds the ontology of the Bildungsroman but, through an alteration of what constitutes the work of the protagonist, presents an alternative understanding of action or doing in the novel and ultimately a different relation between work and literature.⁴⁷ The Bildungsroman, even when it sways towards the Künstlerroman, is oriented towards a protagonist’s course to a more or less steady sense of position in the world, a position underwritten by a kind of doing or undertaking. In Dilthey’s *ur*-formulation of the Bildungsroman – proffered two years prior to Walser’s novel – the protagonist’s development is a story of self-finding, of becoming “certain of [one’s] task in

⁴⁷ On the relation between aesthetics, work, and non-work, see Martin Jörg Schäfer, *Die Gewalt der Muße*. With Schäfer, one could say that even a narrative of Bildung opposed to the work-world of bourgeois society, a Bildungsroman that fully embraces the aesthetic as its lifeform, is still premised on a kind of work, the work of Bildung or aesthetics. As Schäfer suggests, attempts to distinguish work from the non-work of the poet fall within a productive/unproductive labor dichotomy that reproduces the aesthetic as a better form of work.

the world,” and Goethe’s task in the Bildungsroman was, Dilthey writes, to tell a “die Geschichte eines sich zur Tätigkeit bildenden Menschen”. The lack of clarity of the clerical assistant’s performances and his indefinite position in the Tobler household means not only that the Leistungsroman cannot be a novel of social integration, socialization or finding position via one’s action but must instead be a story of *Leistungen* that can become *Fehl-Leistungen*, of inventions that can flop, and of solvencies that can lapse into insolvencies. The clerk’s *Leistung* in *Der Gehülfe* constitutes, by contrast to the Bildungsroman, a form of novelistic action that doesn’t quite add up to any well-formed curriculum vitae; lacking a telos, there is something fundamentally anxious or “unruhig” about the clerk’s actions that demonstrate more trouble than the toil of Bildung and that alters the course of the novel’s plot, which knows action only within the framework of the clerk’s *Leistungen* and *Fehlleistungen*.

In his reading of the figure of the assistant in Walser and Kafka, Giorgio Agamben has suggested precisely an ontology of incompleteness and not of Bildung for the assistant. For Agamben, the figure of the “Gehilfe” is, like the child, fraught by the paradox of incompleteness, becoming a sign of “what becomes irrevocably lost.”⁴⁸ Just as Agamben had suggested that Walser’s characters display a radical neutrality to any kind of redemption, and indeed to the entire theological economy of salvation, Walser’s assistant figures become traces of projects that are never finished: “they do not succeed in finishing anything and are generally idle [senz opera]/without a work.” They are, in short, by Agamben’s reading, creatures of inoperativity, “irreparably and stubbornly busy collaborating on work that is utterly superfluous, not to say indescribable.”

The aesthetic generated in Walser’s novel by this flexibility in the clerk’s position – who

⁴⁸ See Weitzman on the child and servant, also in relation to Agamben, in Walser. Weitzman, *Irony’s Antics*, 81-82.

was “temporarily employed” in an ‘elastic’ factory of all places – and the anxiety-inducing susceptibility to the performance demands of his job comes close to what, in a recent study of contemporary aesthetic categories, Sianne Ngai has described as an aesthetics of the zany, an aesthetics that is ultimately, as Ngai puts it, “about work – and about a precariousness created specifically by the capitalist organization of work” (188). Ngai’s zaniness, which she likewise links to an imperative to ‘perform-or-else’ – albeit one specific to a post-Fordist American economic culture – is applicable to many of the features of Walser’s clerical workers: it has a “stressed-out, even desperate quality” that cancels the lightheartedness or distance of any comic or ironic position;⁴⁹ it indexes a collapsing distinction between work and play; it denotes “incessant doing,” “perpetual improvisation,” “absolute adaptability” and a kind of “trying too hard” that frequently backfires, as in the many examples Ngai draws from the work of the character Lucy Ricardo in the mid-century American sitcom *I Love Lucy*. Indeed, zaniness for Ngai specifically describes the laborious aesthetics of servants and service workers, originating in the figure of the zanni in sixteenth-century Italian commedia dell’arte, an itinerant household servant whose precarious status as a temporary worker is mirrored in the zanni’s indefinite and diffuse character position within the commedia dell’arte, and extending via Beaumarchais’ ex-servant Figaro in the *Barber of Seville* (1775) and others to contemporary iterations of the zany service worker in Thomas Pynchon’s *Crying of Lot 49*, Lucy Ricardo in *I Love Lucy*, or even Jim Carrey’s role as television service-worker in the film *The Cable Guy*.

⁴⁹ While Walser scholars are unanimous in attributing a comic or ironic dimension to Walser’s prose, the specific quality of this irony is up for debate. Reading Walser’s works via the perspective of a performance imperative suggests that Walser’s writing is equally informed by an earnestness similar to that of Ngai’s zaniness. As much as Walser’s clerks adopt an (often Romantic) ironic position vis-à-vis their surrounding world, the way they yield to a performance imperative frequently has serious consequences that preclude a total ironic disengagement or detachment from their worlds. The interplay of earnestness and irony deserves greater examination. On the ambivalences of Walser’s irony and comedy, see Erica Weitzman, “The Playgrounds of Literature: Robert Walser” in *Irony’s Antics*.

Many scenes of Joseph's performance in the Tobler household indeed suggest a kind of zany anxiety about job performance: Joseph frequently says the wrong thing, commits social or business-related errors and mishaps and finds himself frequently overacting in situations that demand more moderate degrees of action – all the while reflecting on the inadequacy of his behavior for the situation in the mode of a reflection on his ability to perform what is asked of him. The most zany moments are those in which the anxiousness about performance don't lead to a busied or erratic doing but halt action altogether and disrupt the performance of a service.

Whatever quiescence characterizes Joseph's person – he believes, as he remarks, that he “came into this world equipped with an oddly generous portion of repose” [“mit einer merkwürdig umfangreichen Portion Ruhe ausgestattet zur Welt gekommen”] – is upset by the imperative to perform; as long as he suffers from the anxiety to perform, there is nothing restful, reflective, or composed about him. His repose becomes, under the performance imperative, indistinguishable from “dry indifference.” The opposite of work/toil/labor, namely rest and quietude, amounts to a state that would have no ontological currency within the dictates of the performance principle, something that would not be being. For this reason, even outside of the performance imperative, in his spare time, the clerk is engaged in a kind of recreational activity that is itself a form of *Leistung*: swimming. As the description of the clerk's swimming makes clear, recreation and exertion coincide for an activity that, similar to Helbing's dilly-dallying, is past-time and *Leistung* in one:

Er schwamm weit hinaus, es war ihm so wohl zumute. Welchem Badenden und Schwimmenden, wenn er nicht gerade am Ertrinken ist, ist es nicht wohl zumute? [. . .] Und mit den nackten empfindungsvollen Armen macht man Schnitte in dieses nasse, saubere, gütige Element. Jeder Stoß mit den Beinen bringt einen ein Stück vorwärts in diesem schönen, tiefen Nassen. Von unten her wird man von warmen und kühlen Strömen gehoben. Den Kopf taucht man, um den Übermut in der Brust zu bewässern, auf kurze Zeit, den Atem und den Mund und die Augen zudrückend, hinab, um am ganzen Leib dieses Entzückende zu spüren. Schwimmend möchte man schreien, oder nur rufen, oder

nur lachen, oder nur etwas sagen, und man tut's auch.

This erotics of this passage point, of course, to another form of exertion that borders on performance and pleasure. Crucially, however, swimming unlike sexual activity is a *Leistung* that remains *folgenlos* and uninventive. Blumenberg will in fact describe *techne* for the ancients as “diejenigen Fertigkeiten und Geschicklichkeiten, die bestimmte Leistungen [. . .] hervorzubringen vermochten und die im Absehen und Nachmachen erlernen konnte, so wie man heute noch eine ‘Technik’ – im Sport etwa – erlernen kann.”⁵⁰ If swimming then is Walser’s modern *techne*, a *Leistung* that can’t decide between recreation and exertion, a scream or a laugh, etc., it belongs to a class of non-inventive action that could never be endowed with the Promethean force of foresight but is destined to always be a kind of Epimethean “Nachdenken.” The point of Walser’s *Leistungsroman*, contra Schlegel in his praise of “Müßigang” in *Lucinde*, is not the Romantic emergence of literature out of the passivity of vegetation as the ‘highest, most complete life.’ Rather, for Walser literature must become a kind of misperformance. Moreover, while the clerk in Walser would seem closer to the anxious toil and trouble of Prometheus that never allows rest and only knows boredom than to Hercules’s godly exertion with its “noble idleness [Müßigang],” as Schlegel describes it, Joseph’s anxious exertion is neither Promethean nor Heculean: as the narrator pithily surmises, “Herkules war er jedenfalls nicht.” Indeed there is nothing of the divine hero about Walser’s clerks.

Disruption of Service

Even and most especially when Joseph Marti hopes to definitely (“des Bestimmtesten”) deliver an unequivocally satisfactory performance as clerk, his preoccupations with and anxieties about

⁵⁰ Blumenberg, “Lebenswelt und Technisierung,” in *Schriften zur Technik*, 168.

his job performance get in the way of his accomplishing much at all, satisfactorily or not. Like Helbing, Marti has trouble adequately delivering what is asked of him and suffers too from frequent parapraxis. But whereas Helbing can turn his parapraxis into a different kind of praxis and a different type of employee-being, Marti's performance anxiety cripples him sometimes entirely. In a scene in which Marti welcomes a key potential investor for the advertising clock while his boss is away from the office, Marti doesn't simply misperform but is incapable of performing altogether. After presenting the capitalist investor, Johannes Fischer, with the details of the advertising clock, Marti, who is instructed to keep the investor occupied until his boss returns, is rendered speechless by his performance anxiety:

“Und die Uhr kostet?

Joseph versuchte auch das dem Herrn Fischer klar zu machen, wobei er ein ganz klein wenig, er wußte selbst nicht warum, stotterte” (79).

Joseph's stuttering quickly turns to a full-fledged inability to speak: “Aber Stimme und Lippe wollte ihm den erforderlichen Dienst nicht leisten” (79). Unlike other scenes of parapraxis wherein, similar to Helbing, Joseph inadvertently talks back to his boss in long, drawn-out speeches that frequently end in the boss's reprimand to perform his job well, there is no possibility to redirect or sublimate Joseph's performed actions in this case. As service provider, Joseph is here, physiologically, unable to provide any service; he fails to control the instruments necessary to do so (voice and lips).

Similar to the scene in the elastic factory, in which the clerk's trembling hand disturbs the form of his writing, this failure of a physiological “Dienstleistung” from the body of the one who ought to be in the position to deliver a performance is something Walser himself knew well and characterizes not only clerical work but the literary scene of writing in Walser's oeuvre as well. Walser frequently imagines his hand as a kind of “service worker” in the business of writing, his

writing utensils, too, render a service (see “Asche, Nadel, Bleistift und Zündhölzchen”), as he describes it. But one scene in particular demonstrates how the disruption of the body’s ability to perform a service, a failed “Dienstleistung” of the hand, yields to a different kind of performance altogether. In what is probably the most cited writing scene in his oeuvre – his letter to his publisher Max Rychner from June 20, 1927 – Walser explicates how what he famously calls his “pencil system” – his unusual art of first composing texts with pencil in a miniaturized and enigmatic *Kurrent* handwriting and then copying these pieces into more legible form for publication – corrects a failure to perform. The pencil method, Walser suggests is not simply an artistic method or technique, employed for aesthetic purposes, but belongs, his letter suggests, to an “entire history of creative work and life” [*Schaffens- und Lebensgeschichte*]. For the pencil system, as Walser describes it, allowed him to overcome a daunting “malaise of the pen [Schreibfederüberdruß,]” a writer’s block accompanied by a physical “breakdown of the hand” that only a shift to a different instrument, a pencil, could remedy by (re)enabling the playful pleasure of literary authorship and allowing Walser to “learn, like a young boy, to write again,” purportedly a central aspect of the microscripts. What this poetology of the microscripts reveal, however, is perhaps less any de- and recomposition of the authorly self,⁵¹ nor any ciphering and deciphering gestures of self-reflexive authorship.⁵² Rather, Walser’s letter describes the literary process whereby an author’s suffering performance is recuperated in the modus of clerical achievement and the clerk’s literary parapraxis becomes the literary author’s proper and good performance. The pencil method belongs, in other words, to the repertoire of a literary author

⁵¹ On the decomposition that Walser’s letter attests to see Anette Schwarz, who reads Walser’s letter as the culmination of a baroque melancholia. Schwarz, *Melancholie*.

⁵² Siegel: “Folgt man der Textur des Briefs [an Rychner], so zeigt sich, in der Bewegung von Verhüllen und Enthüllen, daß nicht über das Bleistiftssystem geschrieben werden kann, ohne daß skizziert würde, daß nicht geschrieben werden kann ohne ‘Bleistiftauftrag,’ *Aufträge*, 67.

who stands under the dictates of a performance imperative, who imagines himself as a service provider of literature, and whose literary productivity suffers.

But the pencil method can't be seen simply a solution to Walser's writerly malaise; the homeopathic resuscitation of schoolboy-like writing that it promises only partially offers any sort of writerly convalescence. Even as it leads to a "liberat[ion]" from his writing problems and repaves the way to "dichten" for Walser, the pencil method is overshadowed by a different sort of torment: "I owe to the pencil system, which is fused with a consistent, office-like copy-system, true agonies. But this agony has taught me patience such that I've become an artist in having patience." One agony follows upon another as the pen-induced breakdown of Walser's hand leads to the "sluggish languor" of the pencil. But whereas the pen signaled a crisis of literature for Walser, condensed in his inability to write, the pencil and its system turns – via the parapraxis of delivering clerical writing where literary writing is demanded (by the publisher) -- the crisis of writing and the agonies caused by this crisis into a renewed possibility for literary performance, for the emergence of an artist who ambivalently oscillates between a boyish pleasure in writing and the very adult pain of clerical work. While the pencil method treats the symptoms of Walser's pen malaise ('hatred of the feather,' 'pen fatigue,' 'breakdown of the hand,' "cramp," "swoon," "breakdown"), it is nevertheless not so much a cure as itself symptomatic of the truly agonizing work of "Schriftstellerei." In other words, the pencil method, in its mimicry of the strict order and dutiful transcription of clerical copywriting, constitutes less a (modernist) homeopathic aesthetic response to writing's materiality than the resuscitation of the performance of writing as an activity that can never be cordoned off from the office and its performance demands on its employees. As a mode of using the office set-up for a different purpose, the pencil method shares in the parapraxis, the Fehl-Leistung-structure of Helbing. The

final paragraph of the letter projects the performance demands of literary productivity back onto the publisher from whom they emanate:

Sie finden mich vielleicht uninteressant, weil aufrichtig; daher beeile ich mich, Sie so interessant und gekünstelt wie möglich zu grüßen und bleibe in unaufrichtigster, dafür aber schimmerndster Hochachtung, die ich frei von Herzlichkeit hoffe, weile Letztere müde macht, Sie aber unter allen Umständen leistungsfähig zu bleiben haben, Ihr ergebener
Robert Walser.

This final paragraph is wrought with the sort of contradictions that shape Walser's writing: a nuanced and ironic tension between a posture of genuineness and just plain posturing, between a shame-induced or timid courteousness and an impudence that tends towards the hyperbolic. These tensions, in turn, imply those between art(ifice) and life, the interesting and non-interesting, sincerity and disingenuousness and culminate in the author's submission to/rearticulation of the publisher's absolute ("unter allen Umständen") imperative to remain, like the clerk of *Der Gehülfe*, ever capable of performing, *leistungsfähig*. From this final line, the performance imperative works back on Walser's entire letter and indeed amounts to a poetic program in its own right, determining the tone and speed of Walser's writing: it demands the author not bore his reader and avoid the sort of cordialities that would do so; it allows for an insincere or even contrived and overstylized tone so long as the author interests his reader. In other words, as Walser writes, in order not to detract or tire his publisher who must remain under all circumstances capable of performing, Walser becomes an artist, playing with the speed of writing, with a maximum and minimum degree of artifice and sincerity, and even invents a method that itself playfully mimes the performance imperative of the office. Finally, then, the performance imperative clarifies the paradoxical homeopathy of Walser's pencil method: if the pencil method seems to treat the malaise of the pen and its symptoms with an even more agonizing productive mode, this is because writing in Walser is this agony of the pressure to

perform; or rather, writing is the point at which this agony (and its symptomatic ‘Ohnmacht’ and cramps) coincides with and paradoxically revitalizes literary pleasure (“Schriftstellerlust”).⁵³

What separates Walser the artist from Walser the clerk, literary writing (the “wieder schreiben” of the recuperated author) from clerical copying (“abschreiben”), is thus not the writing scene, the writing method, nor the writing instruments, but the “patience” the literary author brings to writing’s torments, to the “colossal, sluggish slowness” [*ins Kolossale gehende, schleppende Langsamkeit*]” that characterizes the “process of writing” as subject to a performance imperative, for publisher, literary author and clerk alike. Becoming an artist in and of patience – “.... so that I became an artist in being patient [daß ich im Geduldhaben ein Künstler bin]” – is not just a coping mechanism for the demanding and torturous work of the office but the feat or “Leistung” of the literary author able to deal with, refunctionalize (or in Walser’s language “umstempeln”), and redirect the performance demands of the publishing industry.⁵⁴

While in Walser’s letter to Rychner performance anxiety takes the form of an ironic epistolary confession, in Walser’s *Leistungsroman* it takes the form of Joseph Marti’s numerous ‘monologic’ ruminations and reflections on his self (actual monologues, unsent letters, attempts at memoir, a list of bad habits). These reflective moments give form to and vocalize the protagonist’s overwhelming concern with his performance through direct speech, reported and

⁵³ Literature is therefore not simply the opposite of Marcuse’s performance principle, that is, a perversion or act subject to the pleasure principle. Rather it is, at best, a kind of second-order reality principle: the patient negotiation of pain (agony in performance) and pleasure. This is a different structure of repression: as Marcuse notes, fantasy, including artistic imagination, supply a perversion or rejection of the performance principle with an image of “freedom and gratification” and point to something “outside the dominion of the performance principle,” a kind of, as Adorno will also say of the work of art, quoting Stehndal, “promesse de bonheur” – not so for Walser. In Walser, by contrast, writing is the misperformance that results *directly* from the performance principle and from which it cannot escape.

⁵⁴ This reading differs slightly from Erica Weitzman’s suggestion that “with the *Bleistiftsgebiet*, Walser becomes, not just his own absolute educator, but also his own absolute boss, from whom he—the clerk *in perpetuum*—is permanently obliged to take dictation.” Weitzman also sees in the office-like dictation/transcription system a transformation of “virtuousity *itself* . . . from a sign of freedom into a sign of submission” though her emphasis is on the parodic and ironic nature of this transformation.

indirect speech, as the example above shows, but most crucially through (no less ironic) “soliloquies” or monologues. Soliloquy appropriately voices the performance anxiety suffered by a clerical employee for a number of reasons: as a literary technique for rendering consciousness, it marks the nebulous point at which mental states, i.e. interior being, take on material existence, the point at which external activity (speaking) and inner contemplation (thinking) collide – this is particularly the case for scenes of soliloquy in Walser’s novel wherein it’s unclear whether thoughts are verbally spoken in the novel or not (soliloquies imply not solipsism but a relation between self and world shaped by the relation between boss and worker). Moreover, soliloquy in Walser’s novel exposes mechanisms of self-inquiry and self-accusation that result from the protagonist’s internalization of the performance imperative. Finally and related, Joseph’s soliloquies exhibit structural parallels with the administrative tasks of bookkeeping and accounting that fall under his job description. This is particularly clear in one lengthy “Selbstgespräch” that occurs when Joseph plans to retire for the evening to his “posh” and “romantic” room at the top of the Tobler villa’s turret. Instead of the anticipated rest one enjoys at the end of a work day, Joseph is “plagued for a good while” by self-accusations of “headlessness,” the corollary to performance anxiety:

“Was leiste ich eigentlich? Ich kann mich da, wenn ich will, sogleich ungestört zu Bett legen, um in einen sehr wahrscheinlich gesunden und tiefen Schlaf zu versinken. Ich bekomme in Biergärten Bier zu trinken. Ich kann mit Frau und Kindern Gondel fahren, ich habe zu essen. . . Aber was gebe nun ich dafür? Ist das etwas Reelles und Gewichtiges, was ich zu bieten vermag? . . . Was sind das für Dienste, die ich bis zum heutigen Tage Herrn Tobler bereits geleistet habe? . . . [I]ch bin felsenfest davon überzeugt, daß mein Herr und Meister noch wenig Nutzen durch mich davongetragen hat. Sollten mir der Schneid, die Initiative, die Begeisterungsfähigkeit fehlen? Das ist möglich, denn in der Tat, ich bin mit einer merkwürdig umfangreichen Portion Ruhe ausgestattet zur Welt gekommen. Aber schadet denn das etwas? Freilich schadet es, denn die Unternehmungen Toblers verlangen leidenschaftliche Anteilnahme, und die Ruhe der Seele ähnelt bisweilen der trockenen Gleichgültigkeit. . .”

Joseph's performance soliloquy moves here from the animating question of the novel, "Was leiste ich eigentlich," via a reflection on the material parameters of his existence as employee in Tobler's home office (from sustenance to physical rest) and his social integration into his employer's family to a (worrisome) reflection on the substance of his performance and ultimately on the substance of his self. The performance soliloquy thus does more than fulfill the conventional function of monologic discourse in the novel, namely to render Joseph's consciousness for a reader,⁵⁵ and in this particular case to render Joseph's consciousness of the performance imperative and the anxiety it induces. The performance soliloquy responds, furthermore, to the question "was leiste ich eigentlich" with a kind of autobiographical text. The question of performance becomes an occasion to weave a text of the self out of various threads: an inventory of the affordances of his position in his employer's house; an account of the performed services he has *quid pro quo* rendered his boss; and a sort of self-genealogy meant to account for why something is lacking in the present because of circumstances in the past. The question of performance invites an existential text, opening onto the question of who or what one is and what one can do.

The Service Worker (Leistung and Immaterial Labor)

Both Joseph's flexible performances and misperformances in the Tobler household as well as Walser's ambivalently ironic/serious description of performing literary work under the performance demands of his publisher anticipate a historical shift from thinking work in terms of a dynamic and productive force, embedded within a paradigm of industrial management – factories, shift-workers, management levels, panoptic oversight – to a far less definite notion of work, which recent theorists have described as immaterial, creative, or flexible, and indeed

⁵⁵ See Dorrit Cohn, *Transparent Minds: Narrative Modes for Presenting Consciousness in Fiction*.

affective and gendered in many cases. This shift, prepared in many ways by the work of Italian neo-Marxists, has made and continues to make available a number of possibilities for thinking the cultural work of the artist or the intellectual work of the scholar (not to mention the domestic work of a caregiver and other forms of working on the reproduction of the labor cycle that were previously eclipsed by more stringent divide between productive and unproductive labor, or the divide between mental and manual labor). Indeed, the depiction of the clerical assistant's "world and sphere of activity" in his 1908 novel, to quote again Walser's phrase from his earlier illustration of the clerk's "Gelage," keenly attests to the rise of a new type of flexible and immaterial laborer, one with which Walser was very familiar in his own curriculum vitae: the *Angestellter* or white-collar worker. By the time Siegfried Kracauer drafts his well-known study of the masses of white-collared workers populating Berlin for the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* in 1930, the figure of the *Angestellter* was – even despite its terminological and political ambiguities and lack of definition – already a well-established social reality in Weimar Germany and other modern, industrialized states on and off the continent. Walser's novel of the clerk – more than Kracauer's "mosaic" study of *Angestellten*, whose central analytic ultimately remains the rationalist organizational logic of Taylorist management discourses and practices – points in its depictions of this new type of employee to the rather anachronistic periodization of the flexible laborer as a phenomenon of post-Fordist capitalist economies in many 'end of work' discourses.⁵⁶

⁵⁶ As Maurizio Lazzarato originally conceives it, the notion of immaterial labor is specific to an information age in which what work is must be redefined to accommodate both a breakdown of discrete divisions between mental and manual labor – between "conception and execution, between labor and creativity, between author and audience" writes Lazzarato – and a corresponding shift in how this labor is valorized in post-Fordist workplaces (roughly after the 1970s). If immaterial labor comes to mark the production of the "informational and cultural content of the commodity" rather than any material good in its own right this is because the skills now required of laborers are increasingly tied to informational

Highlighting the fluid, networked, and communicative dimensions of work, the concept of immaterial labor aims to supplement Marxian notions of productive labor with a more capacious categorization of what counts as work – affect, caring, playing, sleeping, etc. – and to elevate the worker’s ‘self-care,’ her self-entrepreneurial energies, to the sine qua non of capitalist valorization, even as these modes of work occur outside any formal relation between capital and labor. As Lazzarato writes, “The worker’s personality and subjectivity have to be made susceptible to organization and command. It is around immateriality that the quality and quantity of labor are organized [. . .] Work can thus be defined as the capacity to activate and manage productive cooperation. In this phase, workers are expected to become “active subjects” in the coordination of the various functions of production, instead of being subjected to it as simple command” (134-5).⁵⁷

It’s easy to see in the existential demands that the performance imperative places on the clerk’s self an early instance of the subjectification of work that Lazzarato describes here. The

economies (“cybernetics and computer control”) and because those kinds of activities traditionally relegated to the sphere of culture (“activities involved in defining and fixing cultural and artistic standards, fashions, tastes, consumer norms, and . . . public opinion”) are now integrated into the workplace. In short, the result, one could say, is that what formerly – in earlier Marxian framework – counted as consumption becomes a central component of the production process at the same time that the prime mechanism of capital’s valorization no longer consists in the consumption of a worker’s labor power, nor even in the controlled utilization or management of labor power, but rather in the proper implementation of a worker’s autonomous subjectivity: “My working hypothesis, then, is that the cycle of immaterial labor takes as its starting point a social labor power that is independent and able to organize both its own work and its relations with business entities. Industry does not form or create this new labor power, but simply takes it on board and adapts it (138).” Lazzarato, “Immaterial Labor.”

⁵⁷ This is, of course, similar to Deleuze’s (1990) albeit more ontological supersession of Foucault’s disciplinary societies with his modulating “societies of control,” which are themselves characterized by flexibility/flux *tout court*, not interning (Foucault) but itinerant: “controls are a *modulation*, like a self-deforming cast that will continuously change from one moment to the other.” In Deleuze’s account one can see how the performance imperative becomes hypostatized as diffuse meritocracy in the post-disciplinary workplace/corporation: “the corporation works more deeply [than the factory] to impose a modulation of each salary, in states of perpetual metasability that operate through challenges, contests . . . [it] constantly presents the brashest rivalry as a healthy form of emulation, an excellent motivational force . . . The modulating principle of ‘salary according to merit’ has not failed to tempt national education itself.” “Postscript on the Societies of Control.”

difference, though less obvious, is crucial. At stake in Lazarrato's description is a shift in the paradigm of worker management not simply from the rationalist procedures and protocols of a Taylorist or Fordist model to a post-Fordist (and in its cultural code postmodernist) management dispositive as described, for instance, by Luc Boltanski and Eva Chiapello in *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, but also from a society of discipline to a 'modulating' rather than modeling society of control, as (another looming figure of post-Fordist philosophies of subject and materialism) Giles Deleuze formulates it a half decade before Lazarrato in contradistinction to Foucault.

Even as the performance imperative of Walser's novel anticipates these discourses, the break or difference it marks from earlier concepts of labor and work (including Marx and Engel's) is far more eclectic, historically and conceptually, and might best be situated in another, perhaps more anachronistic context: a concept of work that that can't quite draw a dividing line between a *vita activa* and a *vita contemplativa* and ultimately between art and life. The performance imperative only superficially belongs to the rationalizing and, later, irrationalizing organizational apparatuses of work described in Kracauer's study and in theories of immaterial labor. But two points are crucial in this regard that demonstrate how a nexus of performance and invention in Walser's *Leistungsroman* plays out on a formal level and suggests a different understanding of literary action and the "work" of art. The first pertains to the way in which the work of clerical writing is instrumentalized for the institution, that is to say, placed (or not placed) in the service of the firm, household/economy, the second point pertains to the specific way in which the assistant's performance overrides the institutional parameters that attempt to contain it and how different kinds of performance escape these.

To be sure, as with Helbing, both the disciplinary gaze of the boss and the internalized mechanisms of self-control, what Foucault has often referred to as technologies of the self and

which, under the rubric of governmentality, belong together with Foucault's concept of human capital and self-entrepreneurship, play an active role in the clerk's workplace. The former are most forcefully at work in the scenes of dictation discussed above, which ensure that any clerical writing will ever only be "nachgezeichnet," a performance that follows the dictates, and is dictation, of the inventor who not only closely observes the performance of the clerical worker but ultimately puts his own stamp or signature on the finished product. Here performing is always performing in the name of:

“Setzen Sie folgendes Inserat auf!”

Joseph zog einen Bleistift und ein Notzibuch aus der Tasche. Es wurde ihm folgendes diktirt:

Für Kapitalisten!

Ingenieur sucht Anschluß an Kapitalisten zwecks Finanzierung seiner Patente.

Gewinnbringendes, absolut risikofreies Unternehmen. Offerten unter . . .” (47).

When Joseph attempts to give his own textual account of himself and on his own, to write his own life-story, he runs up against the problem of this double precarity, namely that giving an account of oneself becomes – within the economy of the *Leistungsroman* -- keeping account, inseparable from his clerical “Leistungen” such as “die genaue Gewinnberechnung” of Tobler's firm. Joseph's autobiographical attempt occurs when he turns from studying the essence of the advertising-clock (“In das Wesen der Reklame-Uhr drang er immer tiefer ein und glaubte bereits, sie vollständig erfaßt zu haben” [31]) to composing a memoir or diary that would describe his own essence (“Doch jetzt will ich mein Wesen ein bisschen beschreiben”). The project ends poorly: “Der zum Tagebuchschreiben so wenig taugliche Gehülfe legte die Feder beiseite, zerriß das Geschriebene und verließ das Zimmer” (94). Even those forms of writing conducted with the “private quill” (92) that would signal a different “occupation” than the bookkeeping of the Tobler firm, an “occupation” namely with Joseph's “own, valuable person,” remain under the aegis of the firm and its economy. Hence, these writing projects become what they attempt not to

be: (self)advertising (like the “Offerte,” “Reklame” and “Inserate” in the text) or bookkeeping (the “Zusammenstellung” of the account books Joseph is tasked with). And as with a private letter Joseph composes, accounting for oneself ends, like the firm’s finances, in red ink: “Jener Brief ist mit einem ersonnenen und erdichteten Gefühl geschrieben worden, er ist wahr, aber er ist zugleich eine Erfindung gewesen, herausgefunden aus einem Geist, der erschreckt ist, darüber, daß ihm einfachere und näherliegende Beziehungen vollständig mangeln” (93). The letter is contrived (“erfunden”) through and through, the fanciful invention of a spirit characterized by absolute lack, the spirit of the clerk.⁵⁸ The letter in question here, composed “briskly” on the crossed-out letterhead of the Tobler firm and which the novel reproduces in its entirety, turns itself into a version of bookkeeping: “Übrigens bin ich Ihnen ja noch Geld schuldig, nicht wahr, und ich bin beinahe froh darüber. Äußere Beziehungen können dann innere lebendiger erhalten” (19). Joseph’s bookkeeping of the self finds its most pronounced expression in another abandoned writing project taken up when Joseph “found himself with nothing more important to occupy himself with:” on a sheet of paper under the title “Schlechte Gewohnheit,” Joseph offers an account of his bad habits that itself turns out to be a bad habit: “Auch dies ist ein schlechte Gewohnheit, das was ich mache, Gedankenaufnotieren” (186). Joseph tosses his writing into the wastebasket.⁵⁹ The assistant’s written performances – drafting letters, advertisements, brochures

⁵⁸ In other scenes of Walser’s *Leistungsroman*, the clerk’s constitutive lack can paradoxically become a wealth of invention: “Im Korrespondieren ist der Commis ein wahrer Schelm. Er erfindet im raschen Fluge Satzbildungen, die das Ersstaunen von vielen gelehrten Professoren erwecken dürften . . . An Commis dürfen sich unbescheidene Dichter und Gelehrte wohl sanft ein Beispiel nehmen. Sie sind es, die Dichter namentlich, die hoffen, mit jedem Sprachfetzen, den sie absetzen, berühmt und entschädigt zu werden. Wie viel edler unn reicher ist da die Handlungsweise und das Benehmen der Commis, die, so ärmlich sie auch äußerlich auftreten mögen, doch einen Reichtum besitzen, der wahrhaft üppig genannt zu werden verdient” (*Im Bureau*, 14-15).

⁵⁹ Bookkeeping, invention, and poetic ambition have their predecessor here in Goethe’s *Wilhelm Meister*: Werner dismisses and encourages Wilhelm to burn one of his pieces of poetry as an “Erfindung” not in the least “lobenswert,” against this he pits “eine der schönsten Erfindungen des menschlichen Geistes:” double-entry bookkeeping.

and other material “in the interest of the advertising-clock” and other inventions – serves ironically as deferral of the anticipated success of invention but also as a deferral of outstanding debts; the clerk’s written performances function, therefore, not only as a pastime in the abeyance of financial success but, by extension, as the credit that can’t be procured through the investors the clerk writes to:

Man schob den Verfalltag dieser Billetts einfach auf einen Monat hinaus, es war sogar riesig nett für Joseph, an den Aussteller der Akzepte schreiben zu dürfen: “Bitte, haben Sie noch Geduld. Die Finanzierung meiner Patente läßt nur noch kurze Zeit auf sich warten. Bis dahin wird es mir möglich geworden sein, die fälligen Verpflichtungen prompt einzulösen.”

Er hatte mehrere solcher Briefe zu schreiben, und er freute sich über die Leichtigkeit, mit der er den gesamten kaufmännischen Stil beherrschte.

With both funds and patents in abeyance, the proper performance demanded of the clerk coincides with the improper pastime of the “Fehlleistung;” performed in the interest of invention (the advertising-clock and the firm it represents), clerical writing opens onto a different exercise, a different performance: honing one’s professional skills. “Joseph wunderte sich wieder einmal über die Prägnanz seines Briefstiles, sowie über die Höflichkeitswendungen, die er plötzlich dem energischen Ton hie und da einzuflechten wußte.”


Technical Performance

Though *Leistung* is used in *Der Gehülfe* exclusively for the performance of the clerical assistant, its technical valence as a metric of expended energy or machine performance would not have been unfamiliar to Walser. In *Der Gehülfe*, the narrator describes Joseph’s work on a brochure that contained “in hübscher Druckschrift, und mit Klischee-Abbildungen versehen, die genaue Beschreibung nebst Preistabelle eines kleinen Dampfapparaten, auch einer Toblerschen Erfindung.” Walser’s description in *Der Gehülfe* of the advertisement for this steam-trap device

corresponds to an advertisement from the technical office of Carl Dubler in Wädenswil, Switzerland, where Walser worked as clerical assistant in 1903. Given the likelihood that the same hand drafted the “Gnom” advertisement” and its literary reference in *Der Gehülfe*, it’s perhaps not a stretch to imagine Walser saw in the “Leistung” of the steam trap device, an echo of his employer’s performance imperative, or vice versa. The advertisement from Dubler’s office depicting this device known as the “Gnom,” would seem to follow the instructions given to Joseph Marti in *Der Gehülfe*: “Vor allen Dingen galt es, diesen Dampfbehälter den zahlreichen, in der Umgebung von Bärensöl und weiter im Land herum verstreuten Fabriken und mechanischen Werkstätten anzupreisen.” Certainly the ad does this work of “anpreisen,” celebrating the steam device as the ‘smallest and cheapest’ of its kind. Listed under the specifications of the device is a quantitative measurement of the device’s performance according to size: the steam trap device, available in eight different sizes – the smallest of which, at a width of 5 centimeters, could be held snugly between index finger and thumb, as a depiction shows – can ‘process’ up to 15,000 liters of water per hour. This sense of *Leistung*, typical for the language of technical specs (such as a computer’s performance) and notably absent from Walser’s *literary* text,⁶⁰ marks a semantic branching out of the word that participates in a

⁶⁰ On the semantic spectrum of performance in this sense see Jon Mckenzie, *Perform or Else*, esp. 52. Mackenzie’s sense of performance is quite a bit more capacious than mine: he attempts to link occupation and technical performance with cultural and artistic performance in a “general theory of performance” while avoiding any “overarching semantic” of the term. Mckenzie speaks of ‘organizational performance’ in the workplace, i.e. ‘perform—or else: you’re fired!’ and attributes this sense of performance not to older organizational models of work (Taylorist or Scientific Management) but to what he calls ‘Performance Management’ (decentralized, post-war, ‘attune[d] to economic processes that are increasingly service-based, globally oriented and electronically wired, similar to Lazzaretto, see discussion of immaterial labor below); principles of performance management are “not uniformity, conformity, and rationality, but diversity, innovation, and intuition” – Mckenzie speaks of the ‘ars poetica’ of organizational management. Mackenzie relates Cultural Performance to the vaudeville stage and locates it in performance studies as well, defined as ‘embodied enactment of cultural forces’ (8). Technological performance: “When we talk about how a car performs, or when we ask about the performance specifications of a computer, we are citing a sense of performance used by engineers, technicians, and

nineteenth-century paradigm shift to a conceptualization of human and machine performance alike in thermodynamic terms of energy conservation and expenditure.⁶¹ Perhaps not coincidentally, steam power marks one particularly pronounced instance of this paradigm



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besonders geeignet für **Dampfheizungen, Wohnräume, Bureaux, Hôtels etc., für Färbereien, Dampfkochapparate, für Heizungen und Trockenapparate, funktionirt bis zu 6 atm. Dampfspannung.**

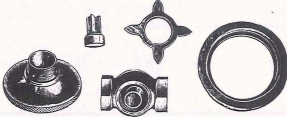
Apparate mit Leitung. 1 2 3 4

Der „GNOM“ Condenswasser-Ableiter

1. arbeitet bis zu 6 atm. gleichmässig und ist leicht einzustellen;
2. öffnet sich weit, wenn von Dampf Temperatur abgekühlt;
3. bedarf keinerlei Packungen;
4. lässt das Wasser von Beginn an ohne Dampfverlust ununterbrochen abfließen;
5. schliesst nicht eher, als bis der Dampf anfängt auszuströmen;
6. ist leicht zu reinigen, ohne dass man ihn aus der Leitung entfernen muss;
7. bedarf keiner Aufsicht und Bedienung;
8. ist der leichteste Apparat, besteht aus nur 4 Teilen von ganz einfacher Construction, Festklemmen oder Versagen des Ventils ist nicht möglich;
9. kann seiner geringen Grösse und seiner Leichtigkeit wegen überall angewandt werden.

Vertreten durch

Die einzelnen Teile des „GNOM“:



Preis-Liste.

Grösse Nr.	Anschluss-gewinde in Zoll	Leistung pro Stunde in Liter	Gewicht in Kilo	Preis pro Stück in Franken	Preis der Isolierung	Baulänge in c/m
1	1/4	200	1/4	19. —		5
2	3/8	450	3/8	21. —	1. —	5 1/2
3	1/2	750	3/4	23. —		6
4	3/4	1500	1	28. —		7
5	1	3000	1 1/4	37. —		8
6	1 1/4	4500	2	49. —	1. 50	10 1/2
7	1 1/2	6500	2 3/4	60. —		12 1/2
8	2	15000	4	92. —	2. —	15

Die Isolierung 1 dient zur bequemen Regulierung der Membran, wenn der Apparat in Betrieb ist.

Querschnitt des „GNOM“:

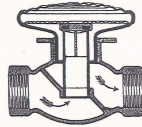


Figure 2. Advertisement for Carl Dubler's "Gnom" steam trap device from Robert Walser: *Sein Leben in Bildern und Texten*

shift. As a number of accounts suggest, James Watt's invention of the steam engine at the end of the 18th century not only solidified the rise of kinetics as a science of motion but provoked

computer scientists" and: "Although performance functions as a working concept in a number of technical sciences and an array of manufacturing industries, although its application in the computer sciences is so vast that it has been institutionalized in High Performance Computing Centers, and although product information and marketing campaigns have placed this highly technical performance in our garages, kitchens, and living rooms, despite all this, technological performance has largely escaped the critical attention of historians and philosophers of science. Although technologies perform, very few researchers have asked, "What is this performance?" and "How does it function in different scientific and technical fields" (11). On Mckenze, see also Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Experiences*.

⁶¹ Anson Rabinbach's book *The Human Motor* tracks this discourse.

complex philosophical, scientific, and literary reflection on the relation between human and mechanical energy, reflections that concerned the capabilities of the human body as much as what moves the universe. In particular, by recasting the labor of the human body in its image, the steam engine allowed for a linkage between human and technological performance. *Leistung* thereby moves from ethics (fulfilling an obligation; performing a task) to physics (with Walser, one could now say to aesthetics/literature as well). To be sure, Walser's brief nod to steampower is not meant as an invocation of this technological history, though notably in the context of this technological history the small steam trap device is not a source of power, like the steam engine, but ultimately an "Ableiter," a valve meant to efficiently redirect excess energy by discharging condensation. Like the assistant or "Gehülfe," the steam trap serves a facilitative or auxiliary and not a primary or generative function. Rather than point to a coincidence of literary text and historical context, or document "a shift in what doing, acting, and producing mean," as has been argued for Goethe's *Faust* in a similar context,⁶² And its force does not lie in how its emphasis on performance and invention provides the formal or aesthetic basis for what discourses on human labor and production are circumscribing around 1900. Mapping the performance of its technological inventions onto the performance of its protagonist, Walser's novel underscores the division of labor between engineer and clerk. The clerk's *Leistungen* aligns him, as the word suggests, with the mechanical inventions it is his job to praise. As one of the clerk's many mental 'monologues' about his performance in *Der Gehülfe* puts it: "Das Schicksal der Reklame-Uhr zum Beispiel, hat es mich wirklich auch an allen Fasern meines Ichs angepackt?" If human and machine become increasingly networked in Walser's novel, this is not a cybernetic point but suggests instead that the realization of one cannot be separated from the

⁶² The context is a shifting sense of what constitutes work and laborious activity. See Vogl, *Kalkül und Leidenschaft*, 336.

realization of the other.

Not incidentally, then, the realization of inventions and the clerk's life in the novel comes to pivot on a type of performance that is figured in energetic terms and that underwrites human and machine performance alike. This performance principle, moreover, is articulated in the novel in what one could call the novel's theory of life.⁶³

Du bist jetzt, Herr Angestellter [. . .] wieder in der Villa Tobler, merke dir das, und die Reklame-Uhr schießt dir als ein flügelschlagender Vogel über den etwas poetisch, wie es scheint, veranlagten Kopf. Der weichliche Sonntag ist vorüber, und der harte, robuste Werktag hat dich soeben wieder angepackt [. . .] Bleibe nur ruhig der "Alte" [. . .] das wird weniger schaden, als wenn du dir plötzlich einreden wolltest, ein vollkommen "Neuer" zu werden. So von einem Tag auf den andern wird man kein Neuer [. . .] Wenn aber einen "das Leben vernachlässigt," [. . .] so muß man gegen diese in der Tat unwürdige Vernachlässigung ankämpfen [. . .] und nicht am heiterhellen Tag und an Abenden voll wehmütigen Sonnenuntergangscheines mit alten Freundinnen über das "Vergangene" reden. [. . .] Dagegen wird man sich seiner *Pflichten* zu erinnern haben, da Sonntage und Sonntagsausflüge zufälligerweise nicht ewig andauern, und wird müssen zugeben, daß diese Pflichten bislang von einem gewissen Gehülfen auch so ein wenig "vernachlässigt" worden sind, gerade wie das Leben es mit diesem Herrn selber bis jetzt getan hat. Und die "*Kopflosgkeit*"? Ist sie nun endgültig beseitigt worden? So schnell füllen sich Köpfe nicht an, das muß erarbeitet werden. Dulde du nur keine *Trägheit* in dir, und so wird, meint man, nach und nach schon etwas in deinen Kopf kommen. Die Reklame-Uhr liegt am Boden und jammert nach flüssigen Kapitalien. Nun also, gehe auf sie zu, stütze sie, damit sie sich wieder langsam, Glied für Glied, erheben und sich in der Meinung und im Urteil der Menschen ein für allemal befestigen kann. Eine deines Geistes, wenn du willst, würdige und nutzbringende Aufgabe. Sorge du nur auch dafür, daß aus dem Schützenautomaten bald Patronen herausfallen, zaudere nicht so lange, zieh *energisch* am Hebel, die Maschine, die von Herrn Tobler, deinem Herrn und Meister, so ingeniös erdacht und ausgeführt worden ist, wird sich dann schon in Bewegung setzen. Keine Gefühle jetzt. Man spaziert nicht immer, man leistet auch einmal etwas [. . .] (140-141).

Life's motor is not development or change, becoming something new, but a kind of agonism:

⁶³ As Campe has suggested elsewhere, as a form(ation) of life that requires its own theory, novels frequently articulate their own theories of life. See "Form and Life in the Theory of the Novel." Campe's points about the intersection of realization/actualization and animate or vivid depiction, of enargeia and energieia, especially in Blanckenburg's theory of the novel and its rhetoric, might well apply to Walser's scene here in which the narrator's rhetorical attempts to vividly bring before the reader's eyes (in a second-person refraction of the protagonist's mind) the assistant's 'inner story' (lively depiction/enargeia/pro ommaton, in Campe's description) coincide with the charge to animate and realize both the inventions and life of the assistant (what Campe calls the trope of *Wirklichwerden* in Blanckenburg/energieia, becoming-real, actualization).

performance as a struggle against life's indifference; realization becomes, in this context, a kind of energetics that is about action/doing and animation at once. *Leistung* will determine the success of this realization. The project of finding capital articulated here is, as the etymology of the word suggests, structurally similar to the language in which the performance imperative is articulated in the novel: filling one's head, as it were, with the *Leistung* of working on the inventions. To recall, this is not a promethean foresight but an epimethean *Nachdenken* "in einem Kopf, der sich zu einem wirklich nutzbringenden und geschäftsfördernden Nachdenken verpflichtet finden sollte" Mental "*Leistung*," one could thus say, is a kind of energetic practice: 'pulling energetically on a lever,' operating a machine, under the economic imperative of finding capital. In the *Leistungsroman*, the interiority of its hero, what goes on in the "head" of the assistant, whether "*Nachdenken*" or "*Bedenken*" stands under the sign of a material "*Leistung*."

Performance, Invention, or Realization?

Blumenberg's example of the spoon-making layman, Cusa's handyman, suggests a relation between performance and invention in which the modest and mechanical activity of the craftsman generates an immodest transvaluation of human achievement and performance; the transvaluative force of this example lies in the discrepancy between the lowly activity of spoon-making and the lofty cosmological status it enables, between the humility of the layman figure and the pride that he claims for himself. Cusa's layman looks, as Blumenberg suggests, not to nature but to the quotidian world of man-made things for his sense of place within the cosmos; and finds in the spoon a confirmation of his creative power, a confirmation of the genuine novelty of his craft insofar as the spoon embodies an idea that breaks from all previous *exempla*. While the "irony of tone" that Cusa's illiterate layman uses vis-à-vis his superiorly-minded interlocutors (the rhetorician and the philosopher) – the way in which the *idiota*, as Blumenberg

suggests, shows “no regard for the inequality in the perquisites” of the conversation – is something that Walser’s blissfully lowly clerks share with the Renaissance idiot, the craftsmanship of the clerk can make no such claim to this cosmological status. The “transvaluation of values” then that Blumenberg sees in Cusa’s craftsman – a point Blumenberg consistently makes regarding Cusa throughout his writings on technology – cannot be the same for the performance of Walser’s clerks, for whom performance or achievement is either something to be resisted, sublimated, or redirected; performance in Walser is an imperative and for this reason hardly a source of “Selbstbewusstsein” as it is for the spoonmaker. The transvaluation of Cusa’s spoonmaker depends, Blumenberg argues, on multiple factors: firstly, on the *Leistung* exceeding the realm of sheer necessity; the invention is not a solution to a problem, a response to a deficit in nature, or an aim to satisfy a material need but the realization of a novel possibility to which other concerns, such as crafting an instrument for eating, are secondary. Secondly, this transvaluation has linguistic prerequisites: it requires that a language exist in which performance can be verbalized as such. In other words, Cusa’s spoonmaker responds to a rhetorical problem, namely what Blumenberg refers to as an *egestas verborum* of technology and its inventors.⁶⁴ Particularly for the mechanical arts this is a problem: the high-

⁶⁴ Interesting in this regard is, as will be discussed below, the language used to describe the inventions in *Der Gehülfe*: the advertising clock is imagined as a bird and the ammunition vending machine is compared to a tree trunk. These metaphors of nature invoke a trope of invention as imitation of nature. While the inventions are distinctly represented as imitative, the idea that they imitate nature is misleading: The mechanisms and construction of Tobler’s inventions, as described in the novel, are utterly non-organic; only their forms, perhaps, resemble natural ones (i.e. the bird-shaped clock). In his discussion of invention and imitation of nature, Hans Blumenberg suggests that this solves a sort of nominal problem for human “Leistung” by providing a metaphor through which to figure human achievement: “Der Topos der Nachahmung ist eine Deckung gegenüber dem Unverstandenen der menschlichen Ursprünglichkeit, die als metaphysische Gewaltsamkeit vermeint ist” (Blumenberg, *Ästhetische und metaphorologische Schriften*, 15). These topoi thus ‘soften’ the metaphysical blow of invention’s technicity by drawing on familiar schema. In essence, for Blumenberg, technology is characterized by a striking “Sprachlosigkeit.” This is why inventors, in contrast to poets and painters, lack a form of expression for the phenomena they create. For nearly four centuries, from Leonardo da Vinci via Lilienthal to the Wright brothers, for

degree of inventive self-characteristic of poets and fine artists, who have available to them a large arsenal of “categories and metaphors, reaching all the way to anecdotes . . . that allows them, if only negatively, to say how the creative process might now be understood,”⁶⁵ is unavailable to those engaged in the technical arts of invention and handiwork. While Cusa’s spoon-maker offers a first gesture towards providing this language by distinguishing his “performance” from that of painters and sculptors, he will in fact have to wait for the French *Encyclopédie* before the performance of his mechanical art receives its proper recognition and language.⁶⁶

instance, the airplane was described in ornithological terms: as an imitation of the flight of birds. But, as Blumenberg points out, the airplane can be called genuine invention precisely to the degree that it breaks from its dream of imitating the flight of birds; its solution to the problem of flight comes not from birds but from technology: the combustion engine and, more drastically, the propeller. Since nothing in nature rotates, as Blumenberg points out, the propeller as a rotating device is absolutely technical, “also weder von imitatio noch von perfectio herzuleiten.” The topos of the imitation of nature is thus, precisely in this regard, less a ‘genetic explanation’ than a coping mechanism used to confront the seeming illegitimacy that technological inventions claim for humans. Blumenberg goes so far as to “audaciously” wonder if the airplane is not so radically immanent to a process of technological development that the Wright brother’s would have flown their plane even if birds never existed. As Blumenberg suggests elsewhere, in reference to Marx, this technological process could be uncovered with a “Geistesgeschichte der Technik” that breaks with explanatory models predicated on individual human action. A critical history of technology would, in Marx’s words cited by Blumenberg, show “just how little any invention of the 18th century belongs to a single individual.” Quoted in Blumenberg, *Geistesgeschichte der Technik*, 14. On the propeller in Blumenberg, see Müller-Sievers, “Kyklophorology;” On rotation and literature, see Müller-Sievers, *The Cylinder*.

⁶⁵ Blumenberg, “Methodologische Probleme einer Geistesgeschichte der Technik” in *Schriften zur Technik*.

⁶⁶ As Blumenberg notes, the *Encyclopédie* is the moment when the mechanical arts are reevaluated and rehabilitated, “out of a sphere of mute mechanisms and techniques,” the encyclopedia generates “a potential component of a new intellectual world” – Goethe ridicules the encyclopedia’s fetishism of the world of things and craftsmanship in *Dichtung und Wahrheit*: he describes the experience of reading the encyclopedia as such: “it’s as if one were going between the innumerable moving spools and looms in a great factory, and with all that rasping and rattling, with all those mechanisms that confuse the eye and the senses, with all that incomprehensibility of a shop in which things converge in manifold ways [vor lauter Unbegreiflichkeit einer auf das Mannigfaltigste ineinander greifenden Anstalt], observing all that goes into producing a piece of cloth, one starts to feel disgusted by the coat on one’s own back.” Quoted in Blumenberg. Foucault, in fact, mentions the encyclopedia as evidence for the connection between analyses of representations and signs and the analysis of wealth that underwrites his larger argument about the classical episteme – the encyclopedia links language and economy. The physiocrat Quesnay,

Walser's *Leistungsroman* might be read as responding to both of these aspects. For the questions it poses in narrative form are the following: can performance become a form of life *sui generis* and what is the proper language for performance. As will be shown, the two questions are intricately entwined in Walser's novel and indeed it could be said that the metapoetology of Walser's novel is the entwinement of these two questions.

Walser's clerks also look to the world of things, to the material world of the workplace, to their feathers and pens, for their sense of position in the world, but these things more frequently serve to disturb or distress the performance of the clerk and, as will be discussed later, often question the security of the clerk's position; the inventiveness of the clerk, to the extent they can make claim to any invention at all, is always already not their own even when the clerk serves as exemplum for the poet and scholar. This is what separates clerk from engineer/inventor. Walser's numerous reflections on the modest handiwork of writing are tempered by the melancholic realization that this craft might never become the writer's own, that it might remain nothing more than a drudging, mechanic kind of work, or amount to something entirely useless (In *Das letzte Prosastück*, which connects writing to craftsmanship, Walser's narrator exclaims: "For ten years I continuously wrote small prose pieces that seldom proved to be useful"). Walser's *Leistungsroman* thus figures a different version of reification than does Cusa's layman. Reification in the *Leistungsroman* is not that of *homo faber*, which, as Hannah Arendt suggests, consists in adding a durable thing to the world of human artifice,⁶⁷ but a reification that reduces the clerk to the material environment in which he works. Helbing voices this fear quite literally: "Wenn ich im Bureau stehe, werden meine Glieder langsam zu Holz, das

Foucault notes, wrote the article on 'Évidence' and the economist Turgot wrote the article on etymology. See Foucault, *The Order of Things*.

⁶⁷ See the chapter on work in Arendt, *The Human Condition*.

man wünscht, anzünden zu können, damit es verbrenne: Pult und Mensch werden Eins mit der Zeit.”⁶⁸

But the reification that unfolds on the level of content in Walser’s *Leistungsroman* is not, at least not primarily, a lament about or critique of the alienated conditions of the contemporary writer forced to invent under strict performance demands. Nor does it gesture towards a solution through a Hegelian resuscitation of the “self-confidence” that issues, as Blumenberg suggests, in “no historically self-evident” way from the achievement of Cusa’s craftsman. The image of the reified clerk is the *Leistungsroman*’s trope and poetology at once: insofar as this trope organizes writing as a mode of “Leistung,” the work of art will have to run its path through the mechanical, non-liberal art of performance (the trope thus offers a different notion of work); and the crux of the novel will become the unfolding realization of the clerk’s performances (the form-giving task of the novel will turn to the reification of the clerk’s life as performance or misperformance). In *Der Gehülfe*, then, the clerk’s reflections in his numerous soliloquies (“Selbstgespräche”) on performance can be read as articulations of this poetology: “Is it something real and substantial,

⁶⁸ Groves makes Helbing’s ergonomics into the subject of his essay on furniture in Walser, calling it “possibly the only instance where the writer and the desk perfectly conform to each other – the only fulfillment of ergonomic principles in his [Walser’s] novels.” “Unbecoming Furniture,” 3. Groves writes of this passage: “In (the) light of this conflagration of writer and desk, Walser draws attention to the position and posture that furniture imposes on the writer” (4). But the trope of incineration might point to a different context as well. In a short prose text titled “Asche, Nadel, Bleistift und Zündholzchen” (1915), which in a speculative reflection on the value and utility of everyday material objects that would otherwise seem worthless, links the poet’s pencil with ash and a book of matches, Walser describes how the lighting of a match constitutes the greatest event in the match’s life, “das, wo es seinen Daseinszweck erfüllt und seinen Liebesdienst erweist, den Feuertod sterben muß” (323). The simultaneous destruction and realization of the match’s purpose in the act of lighting is part of a greater dialectic, as Walser’s text suggests: “Streichhölzchen muß elendiglich verbrennen, jämmerlich zugrunde gehen, wo es seinen lieblichen Nutzen dartut, wo es erwacht aus der Trägheit, Untätigkeit und Nutzlosigkeit, wo es zeigt, was es wert ist, wo es im Eifer erglüht, zu dienen und seine Pflicht und Schuldigkeit zu tun . . . Seine Lebensfreude ist sein Tod und sein Erwachen auch schon sein Ende. Wo es liebt und dient, stürzt es auch schon entseelt zusammen” (323). This dialectic could be applied to the writer-turned-wood in Walser’s work as well: The writer might not necessarily strive to unbecome furniture, as Groves sees it, but, as subject to a performance imperative that demands the writer, like the match, awaken from ‘sluggishness, inaction, and uselessness,’ the alienated and reified writer-turned-desk who desires to ignite himself faces a similar paradoxical consummation/destruction.

that I'm able to offer . . . what kind of services have I performed to this day for Mr. Tobler?" The question of the clerk as service provider – the performance question – is in fact a poetological one. Real is the operative word here. For providing something real is not only the crux of the performance principle for the clerk who wonders whether what he performs is anything substantial at all and whether this performance will qualify him as something real; this notion of real is moreover tied to the novel's notion of invention as a "Realisierung." To recall, the realism of the novel, Walser writes, lies precisely in how nothing is invented.

The logic of the technical inventions, by contrast, lies precisely in how they are "ingeniously *contrived* and executed" ("ingeniös erdacht und ausgeführt," my emphasis). These inventions, designed more to "enrapture" and "dazzle" than change the world, are not products of inspiration and have little to do with a moment of Eureka! Indeed, the ideas behind them are "not exactly new" but instead "honed and refined, and cleverly transferred to a quite different realm of life." The advertising clock and the ammunition vending machine are remarkable not for the degree to which they solve a problem or respond to necessity – the conventional trope of invention – but in their effect as "extremely attractive" or "decorative," and the extent to which they combine ornament with utility. The advertising clock is a 'delicately painted' clock to be hung in train stations, restaurants, hotels, etc. that allows travelers and passer-byers to know the time and set their own watches accordingly while offering various "fields" in which 'top firms' can pay to place their advertisements; the ammunition vending machine is a "practical and simple" device that works "resplendently" ("glänzend," which is also used to describe Tobler's "Unternehmen" in a brochure) with its inner construction of "three reciprocally operating levers" and hopefully makes bullets as available as chocolate: "ein Ding, ähnlich den Schokoladenautomaten, die die reisenden Menschen auf Bahnhöfen und in allerlei öffentlichen

Lokalen antreffen, nur entsprang dem Schützenautomaten nicht eine Platte Süßigkeit, Pfefferminz oder dergleichen, sondern ein Paket scharfer Patronen.” The technical inventions of the novel thus dazzle precisely for the marginal but elegant work they do in refining, honing, and transferring ideas: turning chocolate to bullets, timekeeping to advertising. In this regard, Tobler’s inventions are less the product of a promethean ‘fore-thought,’ an act of radical invention, than an epimethean after-thought, a “nützliche[s], geschäftsfördernde[s] Nachdenken” that realizes ideas belatedly, one could say. This “Nachdenken” parts ways with a sense of invention as creation out of nothing to operate instead, like the firm’s accounting books, as an act of “Zusammenstellung:” a putting together that is not “Erfindung” in the sense of genius invention but in the older (pre-1800) sense of *inventio*, the rhetorical canon that marks the search for *topoi*; and as such a matter of finding the proper “Aufstellung” for a pre-existing technical idea.

If Tobler’s invention lies in the extent to which it transposes an older idea (automated vending or mechanical timekeeping) to a different ‘area of life’, then the highest measure of an invention’s success is to be found in its sheer ubiquity: “Die Reklame-Uhr kann übrigens beinahe überall im In- und Ausland Aufstellung finden.” In this, the rhetorical, sense of invention, it becomes possible to understand the novel’s logic of invention – carrying over (“übertragen”) an idea to another “area of life” – in a figurative way as well. The relation then between the invention and its preceding idea, the “Schützenautomat” to automated vending for instance, is one of metaphor: the ammunition vending machine as a material(ized) figure of automated commerce.

It is precisely as a metaphor of commerce that the “Leistung” of the “not exactly new” inventions can be seen: they figure an entrepreneurial fantasy of self-financing. Insofar as both

the advertising-clock and the ammunition vending machine enjoy the “advantage” that they can be linked with “Reklamewesen” through the advertising “fields” they offer for rent, they are designed to “brilliantly” generate a profit that would finance their own “costs of fabrication.” The technical inventions, *qua* advertising, pay for themselves; and, as Joseph imagines in a scene of “Nachdenken” so intense it leads to an actual ‘soliloquy’ (“mit sich selbst zu reden”), if the success of the advertisements might exceed the costs of production and lead to a “schönen Haufen Geld” (one notices here the ‘alchemistic’ move again: frozen assets via ‘liquid money’ back to a solid heap). In other words, the “advertising” function of the inventions realizes, as embodied metaphor, the economic imperative to make money liquid in a circulation of “Kapitalien” back to their source, a cycle not unlike the rotating mechanism in the ammunition vending machine which ensures that with each dispensing of a pack of cartridges an “erneute Reklame unmittelbar und exact an die kreisrunde Öffnung [schiebt] . . . indem sich der Papierreifen stückweis umdrehte.” The “inner construction” of the automated vending machine, carried over from that of the chocolate vending machine, finally becomes a metaphor of commerce as well: imagining commercial transactions as a synchronized play of levers (“sich gegenseitig bedienenden Hebeln”) that, once activated by the human hand, ends in an “elegant” delivery of a good. With self-financing inventions, liquid capital becomes as “easy to reach” and “easy to grasp” (“bequem zu befassen”) as the lever and grip of the “Schützenautomat.” Except that for Tobler it doesn’t: if the inventions are meant to operate as self-financing advertising-machines, they cannot self-advertise and the efforts of Tobler and his assistant to draft and print advertisements soliciting “connections to capitalists” or praising Tobler’s enterprise (“Glänzendes Unternehmen,” “Höchster Gewinn bei absoluter Risikolosigkeit”) fail with the

realization of the inventions.⁶⁹

The engineer and assistant define invention in terms of realization in very different ways. As the engineer exclaims in an extended speech on invention: “Die Ideen müssen sich verwirklichen.” The kind of realization imagined by the engineer and his assistant is not a Platonic doctrine of ideas nor does it suggest realization as the actualization of what is potential or possible. Rather, for both clerk and engineer realization is an economic matter:⁷⁰ if eidectic realization seems to suggest for the engineer an autonomous dynamic of the ideas themselves, expressed in a language that locates the agency of realization in the ideas themselves (the ideas “must realize themselves,” they “aspire” to embodiment, the idea and “not [the inventor]” “wants to achieve something [etwas erreichen] . . . to reach everything,” “An idea perishes or it

⁶⁹ Here, a certain connection between advertisement and sham (Schein) emerges. See, for instance, Defoe on projects: “A mere projector, then, is a contemptible thing, driven by his own desperate fortune to such a strait that he must be delivered by a miracle, or starve; and when he has beat his brains for some such miracle in vain, he finds no remedy but to paint up some bauble or other, as players make puppets talk big, to show like a strange thing, and then cry it up for a new invention, gets a patent for it, divides it into shares, and they must be sold [. . .] But the honest projector is he who, having by fair and plain principles of sense, honesty, and ingenuity brought any contrivance to a suitable perfection, makes out what he pretends to, picks nobody’s pocket, puts his project in execution, and contents himself with the real produce as the profit of his invention.” Defoe’s distinction between the “mere” and the “honest” projector differentiates between the ‘false’ novelty of the bauble, an ostentatious ornament or trinket, and the invention of ‘honest’ projectors who contribute to the “public advantage” through improvement. With his ornamental and marginally useful inventions that aim to generate liquid money, Tobler would seem to belong amongst Defoe’s swindling “mere projectors.” Because he fails, Tobler would seem to remain a mere projector. As Krajewski points out, when projects becomes “glänzende Leistung,” “gelobte Erfindung,” or “funktionierendes Geschäft” they are no longer projects but products. See Krajewski, *Projektemacher*, 23.

⁷⁰ Vogl especially will argue that invention in the novel is for Leibniz also an economic matter – but economic in how it grapples with the problem of contingency and teleological order. The quite different sense of economic suggested by realization in Walser’s novel, which is always tied to locating “capital,” might in fact also find resonance in Leibniz, who, as Blumenberg notes, drafted a plan in 1675 for an exhibition of new inventions, curiosities, and oddities, natural and technological alike. Blumenberg quotes Leibniz to show how a path is paved in the way technological performance and invention is understood from the “demonstration of the nevertheless-possible to the socially-acceptable market for ‘brilliant novelties’ [geistvollen Neuerungen].” This catalogue of human-made devices replaces the curiosity cabinet by offering not only a show of intellectual achievement and, quoting Leibniz, “beautiful prospects,” but also the opportunity to “get publicity” for one’s invention and “make a profit,” “A general market for inventions would emerge,” writes Leibniz. See Blumenberg, “Methodologische Probleme.”

triumphs”), this dynamic ultimately proves to be the performance of enterprise itself. The logic of necessity that subtends the engineer’s notion of (self-)realizing ideas ultimately amounts to kind of entelechy of the firm. Ideas, in other words, are like the entrepreneur, who is “obliged to risk everything” and the clerk who wants to perform something substantial: they become real, or solvent, through their “Leistung.” This is, in turn, what links the role of the entrepreneur in invention to the self-realizing agency of the ideas. As the engineer reasons in his ‘last-stand’ speech on invention, “An invention is work, but it is not a risk – a mere noble thought rattles the edifice of the world not in the slightest. Ideas must be put into practice, thoughts aspire to be embodied.” Invention happens, therefore, not simply because an idea is so forceful that it must find actualization; it requires furthermore an entrepreneurial body (the arm and leg of the “Unternehmer”) and spirit (the daring “Wagnis”). The idea behind an invention is, like the risk or venture of the enterpriser, nothing without the practice of the entrepreneur, who becomes, as it were, agent and executor of the idea.⁷¹ A risk or venture [“Wagnis”] must be brought out of the

⁷¹ *Der Gehülfe*, one could argue, not only constitutes a novel of the clerk but includes as a subnovel the story of the entrepreneur or “Unternehmer,” a figure that is, as Walser’s engineer-entrepreneur exclaims, “obligated to risk not just something but everything.” Only a few years after Walser’s novel, economist Werner Sombart will draft a “Geistesgeschichte des modernen Wirtschaftsmenschen” titled *Der Bourgeois* (1913) in which he attempts to define the entrepreneurial spirit of the contemporary bourgeois. Participating in the discourse that constitutes a proper science of management or Betriebswirtschaftslehre at the time, Sombart will make central to the entrepreneurial spirit the organizational talent of the entrepreneur to “assess/judge people according to their performance capacities” [Menschen auf ihre Leistungsfähigkeit hin zu beurteilen], to employ the right people in the right positions in order to achieve a “maximum of performance,” and to “drive” [anzutreiben] them in such a way as to “really actualize the highest degree of activity possible with regards to their performance capacity” (71) – most crassly: “the director of any enterprise achieves their results [vollbringen ihre Leistungen] ultimately through the application of extreme methods of force” (121). A major part of Sombart’s book, one could say, is a tacit account of how this “Leistung” becomes a dominant social/economic value in the early 20th century. For Sombart, it is tied to a culture of success which results from “comparing two phenomena with one another, in order to measure them against each other and to attribute the higher value to the one that is larger/greater;” “over time,” writes Sombart, when one of the phenomena becomes greater, this is “what we call having success.” Having success “always means getting ahead of others, becoming more, achieving more [mehr leisten], having more than others,” in short, writes Sombart, the same “moment of infinity” that characterizes “Erwerbsstreben.” Perhaps not incidentally, in his account of the modern

“attic, laboratory, the notepad, the drawing board” and into the “light of the world” by the entrepreneur if it is to become more than a “mere, luxurious daydream,” just as the idea requires the arm and leg of the entrepreneur to “gain a foothold” in the world.⁷² Invention is the venture of an entrepreneurial realization of ideas that depends on the material performance of the entrepreneur. As the clerk says of his relation to the inventions: “Was mich selber betrifft, so glaube ich fest an die Möglichkeit einer Realisierung derselben, und ich glaube deshalb daran, weil es meine Pflicht ist, weil ich dafür bezahlt werde.” This difference is everything: while the engineer highlights the necessity of realization, attributing such necessity to the agency of ideas, the clerk believes in the realization of the inventions because it falls under his job description, that is, the *Leistungs*-imperative.

Walser’s *Leistungs*-theory of invention does not root invention in the persona of the inventor, just as little as it attributes invention to the autodynamic of technological development itself. Instead, it defines invention as the work of *Leistung* itself, which is always marginal and relational vis-à-vis what precedes it. Premised less on fulfilling a social function or satisfying a need (invention as the mother of necessity), invention in *Der Gehülfe* is not the production of novelty but the achievement/performance of refining and transferring an idea from one sphere to another. As the narrator comments on the Marksmen’s Vending Machine, “the idea itself, then,

business man, Sombart most clearly sees the “shift in values” and “change in soul” that characterizes this bourgeois spirit not in business but in sports where the main question is “who achieves the highest performance” [wer vollbringt die meßbar höchste Leistung”] (224). Performance is, to summarize Sombart, a key metric of economic and social competition in the era of bourgeois man. See also Moretti, *The Bourgeois*, n. 32, 35. In the Franco- and Anglo-Saxon contexts, the term entrepreneur in a business or economic context is an invention of the 19th century. Prior to the importation of the word in English-language economics, British writers refer to this figure that undertakes risky ventures as a projector (See Defoe, Krajewski, *Projektemacher*). In France, entrepreneur has military, political, legal, and economic usages. See “Entrepreneur” in *Dictionary of Untranslatables*. The English term “undertaker” is a cognate of the German ‘Unternehmer,’ which eventually becomes primarily confined to mortuary work.

⁷² On the venture in literature see *Literatur als Wagnis/Literature as a Risk: DFG-Symposium 2011*, Monika Schmitt-Emans (ed.).

was not entirely new: it was a concept that had been honed and refined [*eine verfeinerte und verschärfte*], and cleverly translated to a different realm of life [*auf ein anderes Lebensgebiet geschickt übertragene*].” This notion of honing and refining what isn’t exactly new marks the point of intersection in the novel between technological and literary invention; it marks the meeting point of a contemporary notion of genius, tied up with the mythical figure of the inventor as scientist or engineer,⁷³ with an older notion of genius that located the genius’ production of novelty, the genius invention or “Erfindung” in the aesthetic [and earlier in the aesthetic’s imitation of nature]⁷⁴ – and abandons both.

Walser’s Preis-Leistungsverhältnis

A brief look at a short story published by Walser almost 20 years later that also makes reference to the eponymous assistant of Walser’s earlier novel gives a sense of the tangled relationship between writing and economy in Walser’s work. “Der Goldfabrikant und sein Gehilfe” tells of a gold producer named Ortografikus, who together with his assistant Angelus or Gehilfikus, is in

⁷³ For an analysis of the modern myth of genius, Einstein, see Barthes, “The Brain of Einstein” in *Mythologies*. With Einstein, genius seems to shift from invention to discovery, without shedding the characteristic of originality; with this shift invention does become a tweaking or honing more than a production of novelty, and depends very much on the performance/achievement/merit of the genius. On Einstein, see also note 31 in this chapter.

⁷⁴ Kant’s Third Critique offers, of course, a definite of aesthetic genius in terms of exemplary originality as a figure that creates “that for which no determinate rule can be given.” Kant restricts genius to art and explicitly rules out the possibility that the scientific or technological inventor could be called genius because this type of inventor still relies on, rather than gives, rules: “But even if one thinks or writes for himself, and does not merely take up what others have thought, indeed even if he invents a great deal for art and science, this is still not a proper reason for calling such a great mind . . . a genius, since just this sort of thing could also have been learned.” Kant then proceeds to take down one of the earliest modern myths of genius, Newton, by separating Newton’s work from fine art proper: “Thus everything that Newton expounded in his immortal work on the principles of natural philosophy . . . can still be learned; but one cannot learn to write inspired poetry.” In an earlier account of the production of novelty in literature, Breitingger – notably in precisely the same vocabulary as Walser’s novel despite the 150-year distance – explicitly rules out the idea that invention could ever just be what Walser’s narrator calls the engineer’s invention, namely ‘clever translation.’ Breitingger: “. . . one [does not] need to believe that man’s industry/diligence, thirsty and eager for the new, has after many centuries already contrived and invented everything that can be said, so that nothing remains for us but the glory of being a clever translator.”

the business of creating gold which enables him to live in “unsäglichstem Überfluss” (300) by delivering two tons of gold a day to the Reichsbank. The details of this process are different than one might expect:

“Die Sache ging so vor sich: der Goldhersteller sandte das kostbare Material, in Kisten verpackt, dem überausgeschickten, willfähigen Kommiss zu, der das Zeug auspackte, es in einem hierfür tauglichen Offen umschmolz, und die Ware banklich verwertete” (299).

Conspicuously missing here, as at least one commentator has pointed out, is any mention of the fabrication of gold in the first place – the description begins with the transport of the material and foregrounds the activities and character of the clerk. More puzzling is the fact that the alchemy the text cites is reversed: instead of the transubstantiation and valorization of base to precious metals, the assistant re-melts the gold which is then valorized as a “Ware” at a bank. Later, after Ortografikus’ excessive gold fabrication upsets the “Volkswirtschaft,” the narrator reports “Der Chef scheffelte fort und fort aus dem Nichts Gold heraus, das Verfahren muß ganz zauberhaft gewesen sein” (300) – the magic of this act is its absence in the text: referred to only cathecrestically or in the subjunctive: in the words of Ortografikus’ daughter, his gold fabrication is the “Schreiben seiner Prosastücke.”⁷⁵ What Walser’s text represses with this cathecreisis is an

⁷⁵ When the “väterliche Unterstützung” is delivered to Ortografikus’ daughter by the assistant, the daughter cryptically remarks: “Nehmen Sie sie nur wieder, tragen Sie sie zu ihm hin, der sich meinen Vater nennt, es aber nicht ist, da er mich beim Schreiben seiner Prosastücke total vergißt, unil sagen Sie ihm, es sei mir um sein Antlitz, um seine Person, nicht um sein Geld zu tun.” Many commentators see this as a reference to Ortografikus’ ‘Goldherstellerberuf’ and thus as a metapoetological analogy of writing prose and creating gold. Walsers kleine Erzählung verwirrt und verdoppelt die Logiken des monetären Diskurses – und die verknüpft diesen im zweiten Teil mit einem Diskurs über das Schreiben, in dem allerdings die Dimension der Ursprünglichkeit ebenso ausblendet wird wie im Prozeß der Goldherstellung. Mit dem literarischen Text teilt das fabrizierte Gold das Schweigen um die Umstände seiner Produziertheit. Genau in ihrer Verschwiegenheit aber werden diese zum Problem” (Kammer, 213); ‘Walser’s text might be read as an ironic allegory of the neo-Romantic image of the poet in the early 20th century, which exposes a fantasy of the poet-author as an ascetic producer of texts whose value is removed from the economy of signs – a phantasy of originary value-production (in the name of...) as dubious sorcery’ (Kammer). Kammer reads it as a “kleine Geschichte literarischer Ökonomie” that is more than a poetological reflection on authorship and property: “Sie setzt,” Kammer writes, “die zeitgenössischen Verhältnisse, in denen Literatur immer schon Ware ist, voraus und umschreibt in ‘humoristischer’ Überbietungslogik die Folgen, die sich daraus für die Produktion ästhetischer Texte

Ur-Schreibszene – a scene of writing tied to a notion of sovereign authorship and its accompanying imperatives of inspiration, originality, and genius – the alchemy of writing gold. Very obviously, Walser’s gold producer Orthografikus is a personified figure of the disciplining conventions of proper writing, orthography, that haunt Walser’s texts since his early collection of the schoolboy Fritz Kocher’s essays up to the “Goldfabrikant” text, originally written as one of Walser’s microscripts that are not orthographic and indeed first condemned as a “selbsterfundene, nicht entzifferbare Geheimschrift.” In the “Goldfabrikant,” orthography is aligned with the improper art of a magical if excessive fabrication of gold (the way in which this act perturbs the “Volkswirtschaft” in Walser’s text invokes a long history of improper and proper economies since Aristotle’s condemnation of usury as an unnatural chrematistics) and cast as a truly ‘selbsterfundenes Geheimschreiben’ one could say. The act of invention, or “Erfindung” – ‘the hidden abode of production’ – is replaced by a repackaging and transport, a “Verwertung.” The second part of the story elucidates this logic of writing and value when it turns its attention to “etwas . . . Wertloses” – namely, the figure of Ortografikus’ neglected daughter Hulda. Hulda runs her own business, a “Schreibmaschinerie” or copyist’s office of the type mentioned by Kittler at the beginning of his chapter on the typewriter and whose predecessor is featured in Melville’s *Bartelby*. The clerk or *Kommis*, technically adept at “Verwertung” is the appropriate mediator between the father’s scene of fabrication and the copyist’s scene of transcription, between father and daughter, just as he mediates between gold fabricator and bank. Ortografikus’ assistant visits Hulda on two occasions: once to deliver a meager monthly financial support from her father, which she rejects and a second visit when Angelus seeks her services as a copyist to

ergeben” (Kammer, 216); Christian Walt reads the text as a cryptic-hidden review of Max Brod’s *Leben mit einer Göttin* and sees a number of intertextual overlaps; for Walt the text is ultimately a Deleuzean rhizome.

mechanically transcribe, “abmaschineln,” a novel that is itself a copy or “Abschrift” Angelus plans to disseminate in various newspapers. Just as the assistant’s second visit (seeking copying services as literary recycler) comes to overshadow the first (delivering money under the auspices of Ortografikus), so too do the modes of literature invoked in the second – copying, plagiarizing, reproducing, and disseminating texts – come to replace the creation *ex nihilo* of the first. When asked what sort of texts Angelus needs type-copied, the assistant replies “Es ist ein Roman, der sehr modern ist, worin doch auch wieder nichts Neues erzählt wird. Nur die Art und Weise des Erzählens ist neu, und doch haftet auch diesem etwas Hergebrachtes an.” This sentence condenses the spectrum of literary industry at stake in this short text and brings to the fore the questions of authorship and copyright (*Urheber-recht*) it contains: the move from an older alchemistic trope of fabricating literature as gold (with the magician Urheber-author) out of nothing (complete poesis) to a different alchemy of “remelting” and “verwerten” (in the sense of re-using or exploiting but also valorizing), (the language of copyright should be clear by now); and then a shift to modern media-technologies of the mechanized copying of copies. By folding the ‘shoveling-forth’ *ex nihilo* into a reproduction of the already-existing (in the alchemistic trope even original founding is already a counterfeiting) the text makes clear: even the new is ‘hergebracht,’ conventional, old.⁷⁶

The point here is not about bricolage, which as Derrida has famously noted, constitutes every discourse as a tinkering with materials ready at hand. To be sure, Walser’s *Leistungsroman* also attests to “the necessity of borrowing one’s concepts from the text of a heritage which is more or less coherent or ruined” and also highlights the relation between a compiling assistant

⁷⁶ Benjamin, in a slightly different context, picks up on the logic of writing at stake here: “Alles scheint ihm verloren, ein Wortschwall bricht aus, in dem jeder Satz nur die Aufgabe hat, den vorigen vergessen zu machen.” Benjamin, “Robert Walser,” in *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 2, bk. 1, 324-328.

and an engineer-author of a total text, the “absolute origin” the creator ‘out of nothing,’ as Derrida writes. But Walser’s *Leistungsroman* aims not at upsetting the antro-po-theological discourse of text production but instead at reorienting the *Preis-Leistungsverhältnis* of literature, its value.

Walser knew the economy of invention, the economy of the *Leistungsroman*, was tricky. As Carl Seelig reports, Walser claims to have composed *Der Gehülfe* in six weeks for a novel competition. With nothing coming to mind, Walser claims he decided to write about his position as an assistant to an engineer-inventor (who really did go bankrupt and really did patent an advertising-clock and other inventions). When upon submitting the novel Walser was asked to name his price, he suggested an honorarium of 8000 Mark. The novel was returned without any further comment two days later. The honorarium was laughably high, the director of the publisher later responded. “Ich brauchte fast nichts zu erfinden,” Walser wrote of *Der Gehülfe*; “Das Leben hat es für mich besorgt.” More than a citation of the novel’s source in life – which would become a cornerstone of Lukács theory of the novel a decade later – Walser’s comment together with his story about the rejected honorarium suggests a glaring discrepancy in *Preis-Leistungs-Verhältnis* (lots of reward for little work). Or maybe it suggests an entirely different economy to the *Leistungsroman*; one in which, like Max Brod notes in his essay on Walser, the invention of prose is always inadequately remunerated.⁷⁷ If Walser frequently imagines his prose as a kind of handwork (“[ich bin] eine Art handwerklicher Romancier . . . [ich] schneidere, schustere, schmiede, hubble, klopfe, hämmere oder nagle . . . Zeilen zusammen, deren Inhalt man sogleich versteht”), the concept of invention that underwrites it is one that aspires to a very different sense of *Leistung*, one that gains its contours in needing to invent *almost* nothing. The

⁷⁷ “Es ist wirklich unmöglich, diesen Dichter nach Gebühr zu loben” (78). Max Brod, “Kommentar zu Robert Walser” in *Über Robert Walser*, ed. Katharina Kerr.

danger and virtue of the margin this “almost” circumscribes is that the public will find one’s work, to quote one of Walser’s reviewers, “katzlangweilig.”⁷⁸ The Leistungsroman nevertheless places a wager on a kind of minimal literature, a literature in which (almost) nothing is invented. Unlike the novel of disillusionment, which for Lukács escapes the double bind of the novel’s formal dissonance, the Leistungsroman has no irony left to leverage. Its play is repeatedly captured again, anew, by the demand, “etwas zu leisten.”

⁷⁸ Attributed to Max Liebermann, See *Wanderungen mit Robert Walser*, 50.

CONCLUSION
Geld oder Leben:
Value and the Human Sciences

“Kunstwerke ziehen Kredit auf eine Praxis, die noch nicht begonnen hat und von der keiner zu sagen wüßte, ob sie ihren Wechsel honoriert”
Adorno, *Ästhetische Theorie*

In its analysis of value forms in prose works from 1836 to 1905 – superfluousness and need in Tieck, credit and debt in Keller, and *Leistung* and invention in Walser – this study has attempted to show how economic problems of value bear complex implications for literary form, motivating the filtering of narrative information as necessary or superfluous, the concatenation of events and generation of plot out of structures of obligation and quid-pro-quo, or the forms of literary action which life takes in the modern novel. In this way, this dissertation has argued, literature addresses the problem of its own value as commodity, as work, and as art. Through the lens of the distinct and specific forms of value conjured in the literary texts in this study a relation between the economic and the literary comes into view that begins on the level of motif (for instance the promissory note in Keller, the written advertisement in Walser, or the pawned literary text in Tieck) and extends to the deeper structure and form of the literary text.¹ Pointing to the ways in which the economic *motivates* the literary text in the case of Tieck, Keller, and Walser, this study has suggested that the relation between the economic and the literary is neither chiefly epistemological nor chiefly tropological or semiological but what one might call practical or functional; it is rooted both in literary technique or *Verfahren* and in literature’s relation to the lifeworld, in the specific struggle for meaning and validity – for *Gültigkeit* – that characterizes

¹ On the hermeneutic problems the motif presents for relating object and representation or thing and structure in the literary text see Eva Geulen, *Worthörig wider Willen*, 36-42.

the problem of value more largely. In this sense, then, the relation between the economic and the literary is poetic: it concerns the production of meaning. To recall Blumenberg's interpretation of the relation between meaning and value posited by Simmel in the latter's *Philosophie des Geldes*: value can be understood as a "funktionale Spezifikation von Bedeutsamkeit, die auf die Objektivierung des Vergleichs und damit der Tauschbarkeit tendiert, ohne je das subjektive Moment ganz preiszugeben, das im 'empfundenen' Wert des Begehrten steckt."² In a certain sense, the poetics of the texts discussed here each put this theory to the test, probing the degree to which a subjective basis of meaning can hold up against what looks to be an objective law of (capitalist) value, an imperative to exchangeability and commensurability. Can the subjective "Habitus" of the poor tailor in Keller's *Kleider machen Leute* be exchanged for the good life? Is the clerk's strange desire to perform well or provide adequate service in Walser's *Leistungsroman* a sign of subjugation to a metrics of merit, achievement, and job performance, imposed from without, or the basis for a different value system altogether?

Tieck's novella, to give a further example, frames its poetics – a dramatic confrontation between poetic fantasy and prosaic reality played out in narrative form – as a dispute regarding the proper "Verbrauch" of rented property (*Des Lebens Überfluss*, 239). The poetic problem is thereby transposed onto the political economic one in a manner that raises the following questions: can the protagonist's subjective evaluation of what is necessary and superfluous claim validity against a law of value codified by the property relation? Who or what institution determines the thrifty or luxurious "consumption" of rented property? And does the legal codification of this use efface the protagonist's subjective projection or attribution of value onto the staircase? These political economic questions become actual problems of meaning-making

² Hans Blumenberg, *Arbeit am Mythos*, 87.

when the “Verbrauch” of the staircase is turned into the crux of novella’s poetics: it marks not only the protagonist’s rejection of the prose of the world (and his response to the prose texts he reads: *Robinson Crusoe*, *Siebenkäs*, *Chaucer*, *Don Quixote*) but also constitutes the act which, “schlimmer als Einbruch,” violates the bourgeois prosaic order and in its frivolity and *Überfluss* provides the novelistic event – the police, I recall, call the “Verbrauch” of the stairs “über die Beispiele” – worthy of a kind of prosaic literature: “Das wird in der Stadtchronik kommen,” one officer remarks (242, 244). Meaning – *Bedeutsamkeit* – and political economy are intricately intertwined in Tieck – as in Keller and Walser – around a problem of value rooted in life.

In specific ways, therefore, each of the authors addressed in this study grapple with the problem of life and value, of life and *Bedeutsamkeit*, in the literary text. Value, it seems, surfaces in these literary texts when the political economy of prosaic life is at stake (not coincidentally the problem of value takes the form of a social relation between tenant and landlord, creditor and debtor, employer and employee in these texts). In this regard, the texts analyzed here anticipate and extend beyond the role that value will come to occupy in constellation with the term life in the human sciences as they emerge as a cohesive field in the course of the nineteenth and especially by the middle of the twentieth century.

It would be difficult to underestimate the centrality of value in the emergence of the human sciences around 1900. Frederick Beiser, in a history of German philosophy from 1840 to 1900, names the “question of the value of life” the “major problem of German Philosophy in the second half of the nineteenth century,”³ one first raised in the context of Schopenhauer’s pessimism or Nietzsche’s nihilism but which extends long into the twentieth century: to Dilthey’s attempts to ground the *Geisteswissenschaften* in the understanding of life experience,

³ Frederick Beiser, *After Hegel*, 12.

to Weber's 'value-free' science,⁴ to Simmel's psychologically-inflected *Philosophie des Geldes*, to Heinrich Rickert's neo-Kantian philosophies of value, and to Max Scheler's phenomenological theories of value, to name only a few instances. Indeed, around 1900 value is a term that circulates widely across a dense network of semantic spheres; it operates simultaneously as a term in ethics, aesthetics, economics, and psychology, and seeks to name what it is that distinguishes the human sciences from other modes of knowing the world.⁵ The Grimm Dictionary points out by the time Nietzsche would speak of an *Umwertung aller Werte* in 1886, value had become a highly fashionable and indispensable word.⁶ For all its prevalence, however, the term proves notoriously difficult to ground. In a letter to his teacher, the neo-Kantian philosopher Heinrich Rickert, Simmel describes this difficulty of talking about value – a difficulty he encountered in 1900 when drafting his magnum opus, *Die Philosophie des Geldes*, whose main analytical term is value: "Über meine Werththeorie stöhne und verzweifle ich.

⁴ On Weber see Frederic Jameson's essay "The Vanishing Mediator." See also Jameson's remarks on value in *The Political Unconscious*, in which he describes the "paradox of the very notion of value itself," i.e. the belated emergence of value as a problem, something that "becomes visible as abstraction [. . .] only at the moment in which it has ceased to exist as such" (250). Jameson reads both Nietzsche's nihilism and Weber's *Wertfreiheit* as symptoms of the fact that "the very idea of value [. . .] comes into being at the moment of its own disappearance and of the virtual obliteration of all value by a universal process of instrumentalization" (*The Political Unconscious*, 251).

⁵ Cf. Johannes Erich Heyde's *Grundlegung der Wertlehre*, which attempts to answer the question "was Wert sei, was sein Wesen sei." Inspired by an emerging phenomenology, and with reference to Schopenhauer, Heyde's philosophical goal in defining value is to question what is otherwise assumed to be unquestionable or *selbstverständlich*. "Dass man alles Das, was sich von selbst versteht, sich zum deutlichen Bewusstsein bringe, um es als Problem aufzufassen. Arthur Schopenhauer, *Parerga und Paralipomena*, vol. 2, § 3, Über Philosophie und ihre Methode, quoted in Heyde, 2. John Dewey succinctly summarizes the emergence of value as a problem in philosophy in the following way: "Classical philosophy identified ens, verum; and bonum, and the identification was taken to be an expression of the constitution of nature as the object of natural science. In such a context there was no call and no place for any separate problem of valuation and values, since what are now termed values were taken to be integrally incorporated in the very structure of the world. But when teleological considerations were eliminated from one natural science after another, and finally from the sciences of physiology and biology, the problem of value arose as a separate problem." Dewey, *Theory of Valuation*, 192.

⁶ "Darüber hinaus nimmt wert geradezu den charakter eines schlag- und modewortes an, 'das alle welt bei passender und unpassender gelegenheit im munde führt.'" Heyde, quoted in "Wert" in *Deutsches Wörterbuch von Jacob und Wilhelm Grimm*, cols. 460-471.

Gerade das Allerelementarste macht mir bisher unüberwundene Schwierigkeiten.”⁷ In a previous letter, Simmel had specified the reasons for the headache and “Deprimiert[heit]” value caused him. Naming his theory of value the “toten Punkt” of his text, Simmel suggests that the concept of value not only marks “denselben regressus in infinitum, wie die Kausalität” but also contains a “circulus vitiosus [. . .] weil man, wenn man die Verknüpfungen weit genug verfolgt, immer findet, daß der Werth von A auf den von B, oder der von B nur auf den von A gegründet ist” (quoted in “Editorischer Bericht” to *Philosophie des Geldes*, 727). The relativism that Simmel runs up against here – its relationality and resistance to reduction to the substantial properties of an object – haunts, indeed, the many attempts to address value around 1900 and extends, as for instance Herrnstein Smith and Guillory argue, to the present moment. While it would lie beyond the scope of this dissertation to address how the various contributions to a constellation of value and life around 1900 dealt individually with the problem of relativism, this study can point to the desideratum for an account of how the difficulties in addressing value in the human sciences relate to the political economy of value as it has been addressed here. Such an account might begin with tracing a genealogical trajectory of thinking value and life from Dilthey, who makes value one of the crucial categories for grasping life’s “Zusammenhang” (as opposed to the “bloße Relation” of cause and effect),⁸ to Simmel, who turns to money to address the problem of value and life and finds that the “Oberfläche des wirtschaftlichen Geschehens” leads him to “die letzten Werte und Bedeutsamkeiten alles Menschlichen;”⁹ and finally to Georg Lukács, who,

⁷ Georg Simmel to Heinrich Rickert, August 15, 1898, quoted in “Editorischer Bericht” to *Philosophie des Geldes*, 727.

⁸ Wilhelm Dilthey, *Entwürfe zur Kritik der historischen Vernunft* in *Seminar: Philosophische Hermeneutik*, ed. Gadamer and Boehm, 197.

⁹ See Hans Blumenberg’s essay on Simmel’s *Philosophie des Geldes*, from which this conclusion takes its title. Hans Blumenberg, “Geld oder Leben: Eine metaphorologische Studie zur Konsistenz der Philosophie Georg Simmels” in *Ästhetische und Metaphorologische Schriften*, 177-192.

strongly influenced by both Dilthey and Simmel, will pick up the problem of value and life as the problem of form and life.

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